SPECIAL ISSUE: STERANKO RETURNS!

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 28 • October 1995
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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS AND ARTISTS
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Alan Bahr • Alan Bartholemew
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ON THE COVER:
Mad Electrons, one of twenty-seven covers that Steranko created for The Shadow paperback series. (All are reproduced for the first time in the new 90-card set of Steranko paintings from FPG.)

SHOWN HERE:
Flickering neon tints the deco street into a rainbow of hellish hues. You can almost hear the wail of police sirens, smell the steam escaping from manhole covers, feel the driving rain. Is that wailing sax in the background playing Street Scene? It's Chandler's turf–he'll figure it out or die trying!

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THE SHADOW ™ CONDE-NAST 1995

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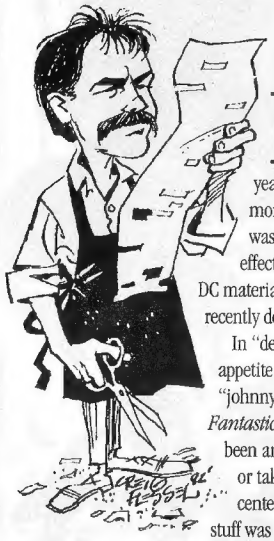

Definitive Steranko!

I clearly remember when I first heard the name Steranko. It was in the spring of my senior year at Coronado High school, about a month before my eighteenth birthday. I was still smarting from the negative effects of the Batman TV show on most DC material and still dearly missing the recently deceased ACG.

In "desperation" I turned my comic appetite towards the titles produced by that "johnny-come-lately" publisher, Marvel. *Fantastic Four* and *Spider-Man* had only been around for about a half a decade, give or take a little. Smilin' Stan Lee was the center of industry focus... Jack Kirby's stuff was brilliant... so was the Ditko and Romita material (even as reprints).

So I took a gamble and bought my first Marvel book since their heroes had taken over the big 4 monster titles. That first book was *Strange Tales* #154. I selected it from the many Marvel possibilities because there was something markedly different about the "look" of the interior art. I was incapable of any sophisticated "analysis" of the style at that tender age... heck, I just knew what I liked. But the work in *Strange Tales* #154 seemed different and beautiful and compelling. The artist was a "newcomer." I was unfamiliar with... Jim Steranko.

As my early college years went by, I kept on selectively buying books containing work by this new guy. I figured I must be on to something because all the fanzines were heralding Steranko's *Nick Fury* work as "an historic new direction in comic art" and as "the way comic stories should be told."

A couple of years later (1969) I rushed to meet my brother Lane brandishing a newly purchased copy of *Tower Of Shadows* #1, demanding his immediate examination of my latest Steranko discovery. I recall excitedly proclaiming to all in attendance "You're not going to believe this new Steranko story... It's an absolute classic!"

Those words were more prophetic than I realized as I marched boldly forward into the Bronze Decade. But in spite of how much I and thousands of other fans loved it, the amount of published Steranko material inexplicably dwindled. Except for his two volume *History Of Comics*, I didn't hear much more about the enigmatic and brilliant artist.

That is until a few months ago when writer and artist Peter DePree called "out of the blue" to suggest a CBM interview with Jim Steranko... the very Jim Steranko whose work my brother and I had so admired more than twenty years ago.

Seems Jim had consented to a rare and amazingly candid interview, relating information and personal insights he had never revealed before. Not only that, but the interview was presented in a format unlike any ever printed in the history of the fan press and would feature rare and almost never seen Steranko art! I said yes without a moment's hesitation, and I'm proud to say that CBM #28 contains what I believe will go down in comic book fanzine history as THE definitive modern Steranko piece, answering historical questions that have remained a mystery for a quarter of a century... until now! Yet paradoxically, Steranko the man is left as much a mystery as before, even after more than one hundred hours of exhaustive interviewing. Peter reported that he found Steranko hypnotically compelling (calling him "the only authentic genius I have ever met") and feels that, like Marlow tracking Kurtz into the *Heart of Darkness*, Steranko proved infinitely deeper and far more profound than his cryptic reputation suggests.

But this issue has an additional feature, almost as remarkable as the interview itself. The moment the hobby grapevine began to carry the news about an upcoming CBM Steranko special issue, Jim's friends, acquaintances, and colleagues from all corners of the entertainment industry began calling Peter at all hours with a literal avalanche of reminiscences and quotes about the legendary JS. Two of the many quotes that Peter DePree collected (from Ralph Bakshi and Dave Stevens) were so interesting that we decided to present them as independent pieces. The many quotes about Steranko that Peter gathered were all given within the last eight weeks, and stand as an amazing testament to just how much Jim Steranko's work is revered by other greats in the comic and entertainment fields. It is my personal belief that the breadth and depth of these amazing testimonials (which run throughout the special Steranko section) will never be assembled in a single magazine again.

During the four weeks that this issue was being prepared, Lisa and I had the rare opportunity to work (almost daily) with Jim. In that time, we learned more about layout and design, typography, color management, and magazine architecture than in the entire previous five years!

In that regard, Gemstone Publishing, the CBM staff, Pat Calhoun, Lisa, and I would like to publicly thank Mr. Steranko for all the long late-night hours he spent with us on the phone, for the generous loan of graphic materials, for so graciously sharing years of experience, information, and expertise, and most of all for his uncompromising dedication to quality.

You'll no doubt hear a similar theme from others who know him, but I'd like to share my perception of this amazing person, based on firsthand experience. Jim Steranko is one of the few individuals I have ever known who truly make perfection a standard rather than a goal... and whose dedication to his art is absolutely uncompromising.

But for me the most striking facets of the Steranko persona are these: While many deform and exaggerate, Jim creates images of the human form that have dignity. While many can accept (and even promote) mediocrity, Jim overtly an unequivocally rejects it. And finally (and probably most importantly)... while most retreat from direct communication, Jim Steranko, above everything else, can always be counted upon for absolute, undiluted honesty.

It's these qualities, along with his artistic mastery, that truly make him a rare talent...

Gary

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BELLA KIMELFELD CONTEST

Soooooooo... you think you know your comics?

Round three! Enter the great CBM Bella Kimelfeld Comic Book Trivia contest! Contest rules: Starting with #26, each issue of CBM will contain 10 tantalizing and challenging comic trivia questions (in multiple choice format) for a total of 50 questions . The individual with the highest score wins first place! Second highest, second place, and so on until the top ten contestants are chosen. In case of a tie, a random drawing will be held to determine the winners. No employees of Gemstone Publications or Diamond Comic Distributors are eligible to enter. One entry per issue per person. The prizes will be announced in the next issue! (CBM #29)

20. Archie Comics was originally known as MLJ Magazines, which took its name from the initials of: a. The first names of the founders b. The first names of the wives of the publishers c. The street car line that ran in front of the publishers building d. A popular singing quartet of the era.

21. American Comics Group (ACG) was partially owned by: a. Harry Donenfield b. M.C.. Gaines c. Ogden Whitney d. Richard Hughes

22. Atlas/Seaboard Publishing did NOT produce this comicbook: a. Scorpian Woman b. Phoenix c. Ironjaw d. The Grim Ghost

23. Avon's first entry into the comic book field was the title: a. Molly O'Day b. The Sea Hound c. Eerie d. Strange Worlds

24. The longest running comic book from Better Publications was: a. Thrilling Comics b. Thrilling Wonder Stories c. Thrilling Dectective Stories d. Exciting Comics

25. Which of these characters was NOT created by Carl Barks: a. Huey, Dewey and Louie b. Gyro Gearloose c. Junior Woodchucks d. Gladstone Gander

26. The last comic book published by Centaur was: a. World Famous Heroes b. The Arrow c. Star Ranger d. Star Comics

27. The Classic Comics series changed its name to Classics Illustrated in what year? a. 1947 b. 1946 c. 1945 d. 1943

28. What was Harry Chesler's real middle name? a. A b. Alvin c. Albert d. Alan

29. Dean Denton (from Detective Picture Stories) had a previous job as: a. a radio's highest paid ventriloquist b. a newspaper columnist c. a college teacher of forensic science d. a banker ■

MARKETPLACE MAIL

39th Comic Ever Sold

First a note of thanks. I sent my check for a subscription and was extremely pleased to receive my CBMs within 5 days!

Second, a question. I own a copy of Popular Comics #3 (in Good) cover dated April, 1936. It occurs to me that this issue ties with Tip Top Comics #1 and King Comics #1 as the 39th comic book ever sold. By my reckoning it was preceded by: Famous Funnies, Series 1 (1934); Famous Funnies #1-20 (5/34-3/36); New Fun/More Fun #1-#9 (2/35-3/36); Mickey Mouse Magazine #1-6 (6/35-3/36); and Popular Comics #1 & #2 (2/36 and 3/36). Is my reckoning correct? Thanks, and keep up the great work.

Warren S. Meigs, Connecticut

On paper your calculation looks pretty good, however when I do time lines based on cover dates I always emphasize the fact that cover dates (especially in the early years of comics) can vary significantly from the period of actual newsstand distribution and display. Not only that, but given distribution variables, a book may be displayed for sale at different times around the country... and for different lengths of time. A third factor is the fact that several books are dated April 1936 (e.g. Famous Funnies, More Fun, New Comics, Popular, etc., plus it's doubtful if Big Book Of Fun Comics was actually sent to newsstands at all and it may have come out about this time.). Which do you count as first for the month? A fourth factor is your personal definition of "what is a comic book?"... consider The Funnies (late 1920s) and Detective Dan as examples here. All these variables make an exact determination challenging. Erik Andresen's article "The First 1,000 Comic Books" published way back in the original CBM #14 went a long way towards answering this type of question. Thanks for writing!

Maurice del Burgo

I've been enjoying every issue of CBM since its return... I especially enjoy "Unseen Gold" & the "Color Gallery". In CBM #26, Matt Nelson's article on Power Comics #2 was informative. Matt may be interested to know the cover artist's full name... "del" is Maurice del Burgo! Maurice drew Green Arrow for DC in World's Finest Comics #15-22, just before George Papp (more or less) became the regular artist in that book. Maurice signed his signature the same way (except he put "Burgo" after the "del")! Keep up the good work!

Craig Delich, Kansas

Whew! Thanks Craig... you saved me from another sleepless night of wondering. The mystery artist "Del" has been the topic of several discussions with Pat Calhoun and Matt Nelson. Your info is much appreciated!

Italian Woodchucks

Right after my "Collecting Junior Woodchucks" article went to press, I received some more information regarding the Italian editions of the Woodchucks' Guide that I thought would be of interest to CBM readers. Before I share this info, I would like to thank (and give credit to) my "source" in Italy, Mr. Alberto Becattini.

Alberto was born in Firenze (Florence) Italy in 1955 and is a teacher of English in the Italian secondary school system. A semi-professional journalist, he has published articles on Disney comics, American comics, illustration, and pin-up art. Currently a contributor for Disney-Italy (text pieces for the monthly comic book titles) he has also been editor of the Disney Book series (US comic book artists); Senior Editor "The Who's Who of American Comic Books" and a contributor to Bruce Hamilton's Gladstone Comics of text pieces and translations of Italian Disney stories. His latest book A World History of Disney Comics will be *continued on page 10*

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DC All Top Comics 8
B. Beetle & Phantom Lady Begin
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DC All-American Comics 61
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VF/VF+ 63 (4.5) $3,000

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Origin/1st App Spider-Man
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1st App Of Batmobile
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FWCT Bulletman 3
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(#1) Intro/Origin Toro
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DC More Fun Comics 101
Origin/1st App Superboy
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Lou Fine-C
VG+ 25 (4.5) $1,500

DC New Book Of Comics 2
Mile High
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DC New Comics 8
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DC New Adventure 24
Mile High
VFN/NM 70 (3.3) $5,000

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Continued from page 8

published in Italy later this year. Other books authored by him include Disney in Italy (1990); Disney Index (1984/92/94); Beauty and the Beast: History of a Masterpiece (1993); American Good Girl Art (1991/92); Calendar Girls (1994) and The Golden Age of Pin-Up Art (1995).

Without his great depth of knowledge and access to materials, all of this incredibly valuable information would not now be known to American audiences.

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Along with a copy of Manuale delle Giovani Marmotte #1, I received an advertising brochure which pictured the other seven volumes of the Junior Woodchucks' Guide! I gotta tell you though... on the flip side of the brochure is an ad for an Uncle Scrooge "Guide" to economics! As a dyed-in-the-wool "Scroogophile" I'm going looking for this one too!

The incredible popularity of Disney publications in Europe continues to astound me. It harkens back to the halcyon days of Dell/Western publications in the early 50s when millions and millions of Disney books were printed, sold and read on a monthly basis (yes...monthly!) right here in the good old US of A! Just wanted to update everyone with this info...Best regards!

Michael Naiman, California

Vadeboncoeur Writes!

Great to see you and CBM back. I'm just sorry you had to go off and see that the bright lights and big bucks really weren't for you. I could have told you, if you would have asked, but it's probably best you found out for yourself. Now try to walk the straight and narrow for a while - and tone down the price-based articles. We have enough price guides and other publications devoted to raising the value of comics. How about some numbers on the other end of the spectrum?

I've yet to pay more than $40 for a comic book in my life, but in the last year I've acquired (in non-brittle, complete condition - generally good-very good): Jungle Comics #20, Military #21, Planet #37, All Good Comics, Star Rangers #7, Broadway Romances #1, Capt. Aero vol. 3 #13 (yes, the Schomburg cover), Rangers #22 (near FN), Wings #4, Blue Beetle #19, and Wanted #40 (Poor). I don't keep track of the price I paid for individual books, but most of these were well under the $40 limit. The scarcest one? Easily Wanted #40. I've been collecting more than 20 years and this is the first one I'd ever seen. It's no better or worse than #39 or #41, but it's harder to find. Anyone with a decent copy for sale, I'd be happy to pay guide for it - $16 in NM!

Any other collectors out there have similar purchases to relate? Any idiot can pay $20,000 for a comic book and get his name in the paper, but how about the folks who just like to have and read and study the comics. What's it like in the marketplace for Good and Good plus books. No one asked Michelle Nolan what condition her Davy Crockett books were in, and no one asked me if my Al Williamson, Alex Toth, or Jack Kirby books were in Near Mint when I did the indexes. When Pat Calhoun calls to get some information about some obscure artist for his next column, he doesn't check first to see if I'm looking at a Fine plus copy of the book... he just wants the data!

People who study comics like I do are generally not wealthy and all we want is to see the comics, but in today's "bag 'em & box 'em" world, the only way you can do that is to buy them. Let's hear from some of the other convention scavengers out there. Michelle? Ray? Gil? Who else buys for content and not condition?

But I'm writing not just to rant about comic prices. In his Adventures into Weird Words in #24, Pat Calhoun didn't mention that the great cover of Treasure Comics #5 (that probably attracted him to this comic in the first place) is by the one and only John Giunta who, just a year earlier, was giving Frank Frazetta his first job in comics in a little book called Tally Ho #1 (which, by the by, can be demonstrated to have gone through two printings - perhaps one of the first comics to do so?). The Paul Bunyan story is by the unsung August M. Froelich who did much work for Fawcett, Prize, Fiction House, and other companies in the 40's. Pat could also have mentioned that The Arabian Knight was done by the omnipresent Henry C. Kiefer. But what mystifies me the most (and which I hope was just a typo of some sort) is how he skipped over The Treasure Keeper story, which is the Krigstein story, and seems to credit Dr. Styz (probably done by Al Bare) with having the art by Bernie. Tell me you had it right, Pat, and that the typesetters dropped a paragraph.

The Know Your America story still puzzles me, but Marco Polo was done by another Golden Age unknown named Munson Paddock in one of his last comic appearances. He had a wide and varied career during the early forties.

Also, has it ever been reported that just before he died, Krigstein acknowledged to me through John Benson, that some 1943 Prize and Harvey stories I'd tentatively identified as Krigstein were actually done by him. So he'd been honing his skills *Continued on page 12*

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Continued from page 10

just a bit longer than most of us knew. He only did a few stories in that era, before he went off to the war.

I also want to throw a correction Scott Shaw's way. On one of his Esoteric Comic cards (in Gold & Silver Quarterly #6) he reproduces a cover from Love Journal #10 and credits it to Graham Ingels. Sorry, Scott... that's the marvelous and uncelebrated Harry Anderson. Known for his Fawcett work, including the first Nyoka, he stopped signing his work early on and became an enigma of quality wherever he went. He quit comics abruptly in 1954 and moved to, of all places, Palo Alto, California.

About a month after I found out his name from Hames Ware (it was the first of several thousand questions I've asked him), I was in a local record store and saw Welcome to the LBJ Ranch (a record with a Frazetta sleeve) in the bargain bin for 49¢. So I grabbed ten of them and took them to the register. The clerk looked at me quite puzzled and asked why I was buying so many copies of such a strange record. I first said, "There's no point in telling you. You'd never understand." Then, deciding that it was foolish to not simply explain it, I told him that Frazetta was a great comic artist who had gone on to greater things, though this album cover wasn't exactly one of them. The clerk looks at me for a few seconds, then tells me, "My dad was a comic book artist, too." You guessed it, I was talking to Harry Anderson's son. His dad had died several years ago, but he did show me the pencils for an Atlas story he was doing when he decided to chuck it all and split to California. Ain't life strange.

I believe we do a disservice to our hobby if we publish incorrect information. We can never recall it and never find all of the crannies into which our mistakes have fallen.

Two other items of interest. I've been rechecking the Jack Kirby Atlas listings with Jim Long, trying to pin down as many inkers as we can. Maybe we'll firm up some credits for Christopher Rule - the unknown Atlas/Marvel inker.

Also, I've recently lent my collection of Strange Tales #1-100 to Micro Color International to be mircrofilmed, along with my sets of Black Knight and Yellow Claw. They will be releasing the first portion of the Strange Tales set along with my "Indespensible Index" to the artists on that portion of the run. I hope you'll look for it.

Funny, they didn't ask me what the conditions of the books were, either. Peace,

Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr., California

Annoying Holes

Cheesecake & Crime by Nicky Wright (CBM #25) was a well researched look at the Phantom Lady of the forties. A related piece by Stephen H. Gentner appraised the Matt Baker rendition of Sandra Knight's alter ego. For a man who died at age thirty-six, Mr. Baker made quite a lasting impression on comicdom. Aficionados of "good girl art" will find The Overstreet Price Guide #8 (1978) to be useful reading material. It contains an autobiographical article by Bill Ward (creator of Torchy) and a lengthy history of women in comics by Carl Macek.

Speaking of the Overstreet Guide (smooth segue), I was delighted to see the third incarnation of "A Price Guide for Price Guides." I hope this feature becomes a staple of CBM, with an update every year or two. I share Jack Mallette's view that "there is no more comprehensive information/pricing guide" than Overstreet. In the intervening years since your initial price guide-price guide, the value of a near mint Overstreet #1 has leaped from $900 to $2000 bucks! Alas, I can only dream that I own a copy of that rare and seminal edition.

A letter from Don Cook mentioned Robert Bell, which sparked my memory. Bell, of course, was a mail order kingpin for a generation of fans. Remember those Marvel checklists he sent to customers? I still have a tattered one that expired in July 1971 when I was fourteen. How I would carefully record each new acquisition in that tiny booklet, always lamenting those annoying holes in my collection. You did an interview with mail order pioneer Howard Rogofsky back in CBM #18. If Robert Bell is still alive, perhaps you might do a profile on him one day? Sincerely,

Timothy M. Walters, Oklahoma

Robert Bell... if you're out there write or call. A whole lot of us would like to hear from you!

Continued on page 14

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Continued from page 12

Credit For Gorgo #15

I thoroughly enjoyed Comic Book Marketplace #26 as much as I have enjoyed reading issues #23 through #25. Yes, I missed #22, much to my regret. My regular dealer, Heroes Hideout (on Nostrand Avenue in Brooklyn) doesn't stock your magazine and has resisted my sales pitch to do so! I am therefore subscribing to your fine publication to obviate the necessity of running around the city trying to find a copy of the latest issue...

Additionally, I enjoyed Lewis Forro's article - "Steve Ditko's Fantastic Giants". I'm a great fan of Ditko's work for Charlton and have all the issues of Konga and Gorgo which were drawn by him. In Lewis' article he states he's not sure of the cover credit for Gorgo #15. I'm not 100% sure of the credit for the T-Rex, but it looks like it might be Pat Masulli pencils and possibly Rocke Mastroserio inks. The two human figures and the figure of Gorgo on the cover are definitely Ditko pencils because they are from two interior panels in the story. Mastroserio also probably inked these figures for the cover.

Lewis also mentions that the cover for Gorgo #4 is a copy of the splash page to Gorgo #1. He did not mention that the cover to Konga #4 is the splash page from Konga #1 although slightly altered. On the splash page Konga is chasing a group of humans. On the cover all of the humans were eliminated except the man in the foreground. His clothing was altered to a Nazi uniform, he was given a mustache and voil`a... he's now Adolph Hitler. To complete the effect the tanks and planes attacking Konga were given swastikas; this despite the fact that Germany usually identified their military equipment with an iron cross. I guess Charlton didn't research their material as thoroughly as Harvey Kurtzman did for his war titles.

Please keep those cover reproductions for Unseen Gold coming. Thank you for your fine publication. I look forward to reading it every month.

Anthony F. DeMaria, New York

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Run A Picture

Please run a picture of "Jen Ny"! Her letter about Phantom Lady and bondage ("lover" bondage?) was intriguing! I think we'll need more than two feet of rope though. We don't want her to get away... or do we?

One other thing, cover pictured/text only comics do occur a bit more frequently than you think (see Witness article). "All New" comics by Harvey featuring "Red Blazer" and "Sparky" on the cover only, had text stories quite often. Keep up the great work. Love & Kisses,

Steve, Oregon

Pat K. Picks Five

I read CBM #25 and noted my name in the letter column. I very much appreciate the comment. Sorry I haven't had the time to compose an article. I have been extremely busy. Nevertheless, I have enjoyed CBM. I particularly like the piece on "5 Best Covers". It is very tough, isn't it? Well, here are my selections including the logic behind my choices:

More Fun #61 - See it in Mint and you will be corrupted on the spot. A bright blue & yellow mystical Dr. Fate flying out of a phosphorescent background of orange and red. "It's ALIVE."

Detective #31 - The classic of the classic comics. Batman's finest hour. Detective #35 & More Fun #54 close behind. More Fun #65 & Wonderworld #7 even further back for classic comics.

Adventure #79 - The ultimate WWII patriotic cover. Superman #24 is close behind, but Kirby is too much here. Cap #7 also very close.

Weird Science Fantasy #29 - The ultimate Sci-Fi cover. This was a cult book in the 1960's. Nothing else close. Sorry Startling #49 fans.

Sea Devils #2-The best of the gray tone covers. Find a NM+ copy and you will agree. It has one of the most powerful villain images. Brave and the Bold #23, a close second here.

Well it was tough. What is worse is that I only own high grade copies of two of these.

Pat Kochanek, Pennsylvania

Nice to hear from you Pat. I am one of the many CBM readers who look forward to your next article! *continued on page 17*

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27 NM-92 ..... $210

Whiz
153 Fair * $40
Death Cvr/story
World of Mystery
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6 NM93 *(w) $165
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10 NM93 ..... $150
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21 VF+89 ..... $135
22 VF+86 ..... $75
24 VF+86 ..... $85
25 VF+89 ..... $300
27 NM-91 ..... $140
29 VF83 ..... $60
31 VF83 ..... $50
33 NM-92 ..... $100
44 NM94 * $70

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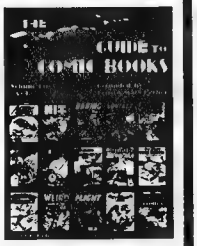

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Detective Comics #11 GD- Scarce ... $550
Detective Comics #30 VG Scarce .. $1500
Eerie #4 VF+ $400
Famous Funnies #3 VG Scarce $1200
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Canadian "Whites"

I always enjoy the new CBM, but I was particularly intrigued by Nicky Wright's article on the "Mystery Whiz".

You may be interested to know that Double "A" Comics (a.k.a. the Anglo-American Publishing Company Ltd.) also published a similar venue for Captain Marvel Jr. called "Grand Slam Comics."

The two issues I own (Vol.2 #12, Nov., 1943 and Vol. 3 #2, Jan., 1944) make no mention whatsoever of Fawcett Publications, Inc., and the interior art ranges from passable to grossly incompetent. Ironically, 172 John Street (the home of Anglo-American) in Toronto is currently rented out as artist's studios.

Collectors south of the border who have previously overlooked Canadian editions from the 40's might bear in mind that our market has generally been about one tenth the size of the American market, so there is little doubt that these Canadian "whites" are somewhat scarce. The poor quality newsprint (interiors and covers) ensures that few copies would have survived in higher grades.

Happily though, when copies do hit the market they are often quite cheap, a welcome addition to the "low end" collections some folks are pleased to treasure as part of our comic book heritage.

Keep up the excellent sleuthing and many thanks for a first-rate magazine. Sincerely,

Mel Taylor, Ontario, Canada

Orphan Period

First, I'm delighted with the general thrust of CBM-Golden & Silver Age. I am into the early 50's; but this period is generally regarded as sort of an "orphan period" belonging to neither the Gold nor the Silver Age. I'm hoping you will help change all that. Give it the attention it deserves. What do I most want to see? 50's Horror, the more the better! (Can't wait for #29!!) This latest (#27) is only my third issue. Loved the coverage (and covers!) on Phantom Lady in #25 and Schomburg in #26. Keep it up I love it! Gary Fox (London, England) asked about the existence of certain I.W./Super reprints. I can vouch for one: Jungle Adventures #10. I have it. Sorry it's not for sale. It reprints "Harem of Horror", which was (unfortunately) the only Rulah story I ever saw back then. Now maybe someone can help me. I am looking for a horror comic from the 50's. I'm sure it's Atlas, probably Astonishing, might be pre- or post-Code. The cover shows a clock on a post, casting a shadow on the sidewalk. Hand and arms reach up from the shadow & grab a man by the neck. The caption reads: "It was just an ordinary timepiece - or was it?". Anyone out there know the title & number? Whoa! What is this?! Brian D. Gardner (#27), and your reply to him, mention comics or microfiche from a firm called MicroColor. Tell me more, please! How do I contact these people? I have a good deal of research I want to do. For starters, I'm looking for two Zip-Jet (Rocketman) stories, a Kaanga story, & half a dozen horror stories. Help help help help please!!!

Thanks for reading this far & sorry I'm so long winded. Did I mention, here's my check I'm subscribing.

Richard H. Davis, Tennessee

Ask and Ye shall receive! The address you seek is: MicroColor International, 85 Godwin Ave., Midland Park, NJ 07432. Ph. (201) 445-3450.

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My thanks to everyone who wrote in this time, I look forward to hearing comments and suggestions from CBM readers all over the world. You're all part of the "CBM family" now, and your opinion counts! I hope you'll write or FAX soon! Please note that CBM reserves the right to edit letters selected for publication for length and/or content. If you'd care to write, send communications to:

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1950's... The Love Glut

ROMANCE WAS NO MERE FLIRTATION IN THE COMICS OF 1950!

In fact, the story of the romance genre is really the seldom-told account of the first big glut in comic book history... and it makes other gluts and implosions pale by comparison!

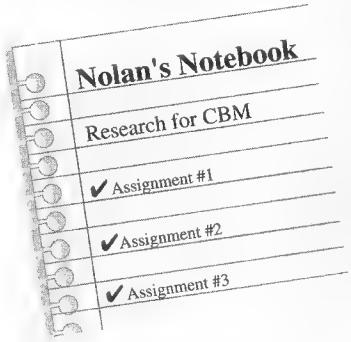
One "undiscovered" comic book classic tells, with dead-on satire, the tale of how a crush on love almost proved to be a fatal attraction for publishers in 1950. "The Love Story to End All Love Stories!" was even more than that, however, when it appeared in *Modern Love* #8 (August/ September, 1950)... the last story in the last EC romance comic.

It was, figuratively if not literally, the beginning of *MAD Magazine*. "Blame This on Feldstein" was the credit, and, indeed, the story was an inspired piece of artistic and verbal lunacy by Al Feldstein, who would later become the editor of *MAD*.

Feldstein's eight-page satirical masterpiece is one of the earliest examples of how comic book editors and publishers were well aware of each other's faults and follies, perhaps more so than we give them credit for in today's ultra-hip world.

The story of what led to Feldstein's love story is a fascinating example of how the comic book world functioned nearly half a century ago and, indeed, still functions after a fashion (pun fully intended). It's the seldom-told, never really documented account of the first big glut in comics history, and it makes other gluts and implosions pale by comparison.

We'll come back to Feldstein's fable, but first, let's look at the scene as 1950 began. The romance genre then was less than three years old, having been created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby for *Young Romance* from Prize Publications in 1947. Yes, the first issue of the four-issue series *My Date*, created by S&K for Hillman Publications, predated *Young Romance* by four months, but *My Date*, was definitely designed as a teen humor comic and not a straight romance series. And yes, *Romantic Picture Novelettes* appeared as a one-shot in 1946 from Magazine Enterprises (ME), but this was nothing more than "Mary Worth" newspaper strip reprints, hardly worthy of being called the



first romance comic. Simon and Kirby created the genre, no ifs, ands or buts!

It took publishers more than a year to catch the love bug, but once they did, it bit them hard. There were four romance titles by the end of 1948–one each from Prize, Fawcett, Fox, and Marvel–but MORE THAN 125 TITLES BY THE END OF 1949, representing an explosion significantly greater in magnitude, if not necessarily in significance, than the super hero boom of the 1939-40 period after the introduction of Superman in 1938.

During the first half of 1950, it seemed as if comic book publishers had all stood under far too much mistletoe during the holiday season. There were fully 148 different titles from 26 companies representing no fewer than 335 comic books devoted entirely to "serious" (if they can be called that) romantic themes! And this doesn't even account for the likes of Archie, Binky, Patsy, and their large cadre of teenage gals 'n pals.

BY MICHELLE NOLAN

Crash Follows Crush

When the romance crash came after the love crush, it hit hard — harder, and with more ferocity, than at any time before or since in comic history. Of those 148 titles, fully 119 were either discontinued or seriously interrupted (meaning a hiatus of at least six months). Only 150 romance comics were published in the second half of 1950, and only 58 of those were dated October, November, or December. (In fact, only 15 romance comics were dated December, 1950!) The romance field had suffered a truly staggering decline in less than six months.

How hard did the romance glut hit? It hit harder than a Dear John letter. Only one new romance title, the short-lived *Dear Beatrice Fairfax* from Standard Comics, entered the fray in the second half of 1950! Another title, Harvey's *Hi-School Romance*, was continued with issue #6 for December, 1950, after a hiatus of six months. Incidentally, the five issues of *Dear Beatrice Fairfax*, #'s 5-9, all have stunning airbrush covers by Alex Schomburg, representing not only a radical departure from most of his comic book work, but some of his last work in Golden Age comics.

Think about this for a minute, and you'll see how staggering the Love Glut really was: after the introduction of nearly 150 romance titles in the one-year period beginning in mid-1949, exactly one new love comic was introduced in the second half of 1950! And, ironically, *Dear Beatrice Fairfax* lasted only the five issues, vanishing later in 1951 just as the romance market was beginning to make a healthy recovery.

Dan Stevenson's painstakingly researched year-by-year accounting of newsstand comic book totals shows 2,284 issues in 1950. There is

A PANEL FROM AL FELDSTIEN'S "PRE-MAD" SATIRE... of the love glut from Modern Love #8 (Aug/Sep 1950).

©WILLIAM M. GAINES 1950

some minor potential margin of error, depending on the status of a handful of issues that may or may not exist... but it's accurate enough to suggest that, of the comic books published in 1950, more than one-fourth (585 to be exact) were serious romance comics!

Just think about what that number represents: in 1950, romance comics–a genre that did not even exist four years earlier–represented almost as many issues as were published of all titles in 1940 (693), only a decade earlier!

Hit Hard By The Glut!

Two publishers, Marvel (Timely) and Fox, were particularly hurt by the romance glut, especially since they contributed so much to it themselves. This was hardly surprising, since the two prolific publishers were famous for their "jumping-on-the-comic-bandwagon" approach to publishing.

Marvel had 30 romance titles (a few of which changed names, but were essentially the same comic) in late 1949 or early 1950, but only five survived the full year, and even those were published quarterly.

Fox had 21 titles, all which were discontinued by August of 1950. Among my favorite examples of title changes were these Fox gems: *My Love Affair* became *March of Crime* (well, maybe that's not so far off after all); *My Past Confessions* became *Crimes, Inc.* (hmmmmm... could be that wasn't so strange, at that!); *My Love Memoirs* became *Hunted* (another apropos switch, perhaps!); and *My Desire* became *Murder, Inc.* (again, perhaps more accurate than we'd care to admit!). The funkiest title change, though, occurred when *My Intimate Affair* became *Inside Crime!* The mind boggles.

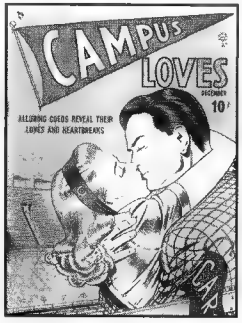
In retrospect, it's probably surprising that Fox didn't come up with a comic book entitled *My Intimate Crime* or maybe *My Criminal Desires*. You can bet Fox would have, if they thought it would sell!

Love Duplicated

Speaking of love titles, some of the publishers were in such a rush to get out love comics that they duplicated titles, or nearly so. For example, both Quality and Orbit published a *Love Diary* #1, with Orbit's dated July, 1949 and Quality's September, 1949. Quality was forced to change to *Diary Loves* with #2, but for the purposes of "issue counts" used in this article, the two Quality issues are counted the same title, since the genre didn't change. The same applies to Superior's *My Secret/Our Secret*. Perhaps Superior changed to avoid confusion with Fox, which began most of its titles with "My". One can just imagine Superior's publisher, eyeballing the "sleaze" from Victor Fox, saying, "Oh, my... let's change our title!"

Love comics were coming so fast and furious that some issues might have confused the readers, too. For example, Standard's *Western Hearts* #1 and Marvel's *Western Life Romance* #1, both dated Dec., 1949, each featured photo covers of Whip Wilson and Reno Browne, the "stars" of Monogram Pictures, a soon-to-be-forgotten Poverty Row studio.

Two other publishers had more than 10 romance titles early in 1950, Fawcett (17) and Quality (14). Quality canceled or interrupted all 14 titles late in 1950, and Fawcett did the same with 13 of its 17. Interestingly, though, four titles from financially stable media giant Fawcett continued without missing a beat... the monthlies *Sweethearts, Life Story* and *Romantic Secrets* and the bi-monthly *Romantic Story*.



In that regard, Fawcett was a step ahead of all the other publishers. Fawcett obviously decided midway through 1950 that it would be better to publish far fewer titles, but to publish them often for name recognition. The entire industry pretty much

A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS...

Does it exist?

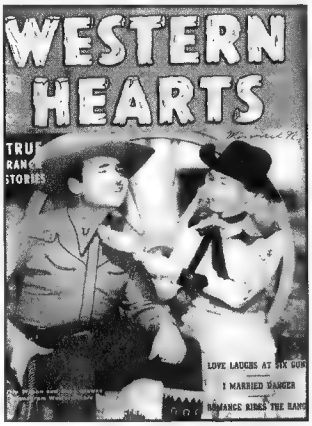
This columnist and two other longtime romance collectors (Dan Stevenson and Jim Vadeboncoeur) have documented and confirmed 98 percent of the nearly 5,900 romance comics ever published. One question we could use some help with... Does *Love Trails* #2 from Marvel exist? Can anyone help on this? Please forward any Information to Nolan's Notebook c/o CBM. Thanks!

followed that pattern in 1951, when the number of romance comics (401) quickly bounced back to a little more than two-thirds the 1950 total, but the number of titles (73) was only about half that of 1950. Interestingly, 27 different companies published romance comics in 1951, so the genre, despite the massive cutbacks in the second half of 1950, came back on the rebound well enough to achieve considerable stability throughout the rest of the decade.

Indeed, Stevenson's year-by-year listing shows only 1,510 newsstand comics in 1959, a precipitous drop from the record high of 3,162 in 1952, but the 1959 romance total was still a respectable 159 issues from five companies. That total shrunk steadily in the 1970s, however, until the romance comic was essentially dead by the end of the Bronze Age decade... the victim of societal changes far more powerful than a publishing glut of three decades earlier.

...To End All Love Stories

Let's return to Feldstein's "Love Story to End All Love Stories!" It begins in the offices of Mr. T. Tot, a comic book publisher (*Modern Love* really was published, if you can believe it, by the EC subsidiary "Tiny Tot Comics"! Shades of Dr. Wertham!). It seems that the estimable Mr. Tot has fallen in love with a witch (literally) named Cobina, who, however, has more of a hunger for hamburgers than hams like him. Far from discouraged, though, he woos the fair Cobina and decides to drop his crime comic book line in favor of publishing romance.



One of his assistants, stunned, blurts out, "No more *crime might pay*? No more *crime could pay*? No more *crime ought to pay*? No more *crime should pay*? No more *crime used to pay*? No more *crime does so pay*? No more crime, T.T.?"

Responds Mr. Tot, "No! I want...*Love Might Pay*, *Love Could Pay*, *Love Ought to Pay*, *Love Should Pay*, *Loved Used to Pay* and *Love Does So Pay*! It will pay!" Soon, rivals such as V. Wolf and Love Greasin have deluged the love comic book market to the point that, in the offices of Arnold Harvey Hermann, the ultimate decision is reached: to put horror into comics! (Ironically, a process that already had begun and would be speeded considerably by the Love Glut!)

Mr. T. Tot, having been cruelly mocked by Cobina when she learns he no longer can pay for her hungers, is lamenting his losses when he's visited by Jack Lyman and Joe Curry, who commit suicide with a leap from his office building to make him suffer for all the pain they have caused him. (It should be noted, though, that Simon and Kirby's two mainstream love comics in 1950 were among the few titles to somehow prosper uninterrupted through the love glut, in fact appearing monthly, so Feldstein's satire wasn't entirely on the money.)

Eventually, after he goes crazy from the suffering he has caused fellow editors and because of his own financial ruin, the good Mr. Tot shoots himself, plus Cobina and his two assistants, leaving the entire publishing empire in the hands of his office boy, who looks suspiciously like Feldstein!

It's all in fun, of course, but it's amazing how accurately Feldstein nailed the problems caused by the Love Glut! Especially considering that this story hit the stands in May or June of 1950 and was written even earlier, well before the full effects of the glut had been felt. But by then, publisher Bill Gaines and associate editor Feldstein had already seen the future for EC, and it sure wasn't filled with romance! ■

Michelle Nolan is a nationally recognized collector and researcher of comic books from the '40s through the '60s. She has one of the most extensive collections of 1950's comic books in the United States.

THE LOVE GLUT

They Survived!

They Survived... The Love Glut! The 29 comics published without interruption in 1950:

Girls' Love Stories (DC), b
Girls' Romances (DC), b
Sweethearts (Fawcett), m
Life Story (Fawcett), m
Romantic Secrets (Fawcett), m
Romantic Story (Fawcett), b
Lovelorn (ACG), b
Romantic Adventures (ACG), b
Glamorous Romances (Ace), b
Real Love (Ace), b
Love At First Sight (Ace), q
Boy Meets Girl (Gleason), b
Lovers' Lane (Gleason), b
Personal Love (Eastern), b
Movie Love (Eastern), b
Young Romance (Prize), m
Young Love (Prize), m
My Own Romance (Marvel), q
Love Romances (Marvel), q
Lovers (Marvel), q
Love Tales (Marvel), q
Girl Comics (Marvel), q
Teen-Age Romances (St. John), b
Popular Romance (Standard), b
Thrilling Romances (Standard), b
New Romances (Standard), b
Intimate Love (Standard), b
Western Hearts (Standard), q
Love Diary (Orbit), became m

b = bimonthly
m = monthly
q = quarterly

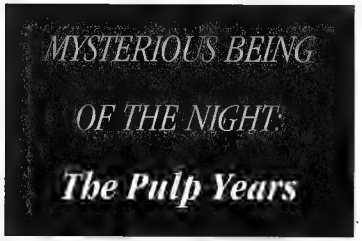
The Shadow... Weird Avenger of Crime!

BY
TODD D. SEVERIN
AND KEITH HOLT

THUNDERING AUTOMATICS BLASTING RED-LIPPED FLAME RUMBLE IN THE NIGHT–ANSWERING BLASTS ECHO BACK–FINAL VOLLEYS FROM AUTOMATICS–SILENCE. THEN FROM THE BLACKNESS BEHIND AUTOMATICS MOVES A DEEPER BLACKNESS–A SHADOW WITHIN A SHADOW – AND DISAPPEARS INTO THE NIGHT.

AND ON THE CHILL NIGHT AIR IS BORNE A PEAL OF LAUGHTER. THE TRIUMPHANT LAUGH OF THE SHADOW!

—The Shadow Magazine (March 15, 1941)



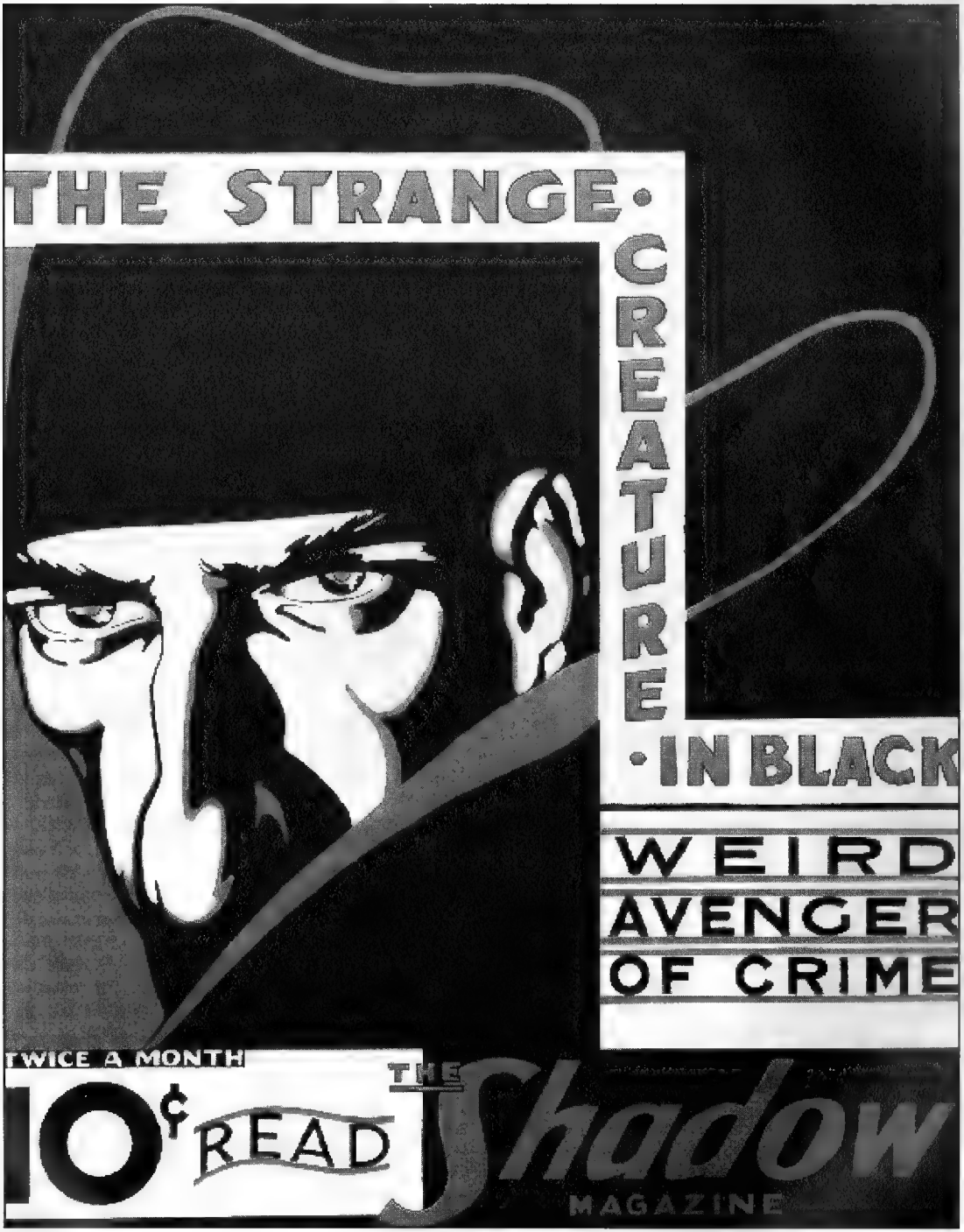
From April of 1931 until the Summer of 1949, terse words of thrilling prose like those above lit the imaginative fires of a nation. During this time, The Shadow reigned as the undisputed king of the pulps; the weird avenger of crime; the strange creature in black. Behind strikingly painted covers, emblazoned with titles like, "Face of Doom," "The Death Tower," or "The Ghost Makers," lurked rabid stories of murder, deceit, and the ultimate in mystery. Villains such as The Silver Skull, Shiwan Khan, and The Green Terror raged illicit wars against society and there was only one person capable of stopping their fiendish plans; the mysterious being of the night- The Shadow!

The creation of the Shadow rocked the publishing world of the early thirties, and began a tale of imagination and business savvy that is as interesting as many of The Shadow's stories themselves. Born from the most inauspicious of beginnings, The Shadow rose above its unsavory roots and emerged as an unforgettable cultural icon, a catalyst for the resurrection of an entire publishing genre... and most remarkable of all, a literary character that has endured through the generations.

The Shadow, as with many of history's most unusual heroes, was a product of his era. At the time of his birth, economic uncertainty and social decline prevailed across the nation. America had been plunged into the Great Depression following the Stock Market Crash of 1929. With the first hints of war raging just beyond the Nation's boundaries, America campaigned its own internal struggle against the ravishes of organized crime as gangsters such as Dillinger, Machine Gun Kelly, Pretty Boy Floyd and Bonnie and Clyde captured the nation's headlines. It was a time of uncertainty. It was a time for heroes.

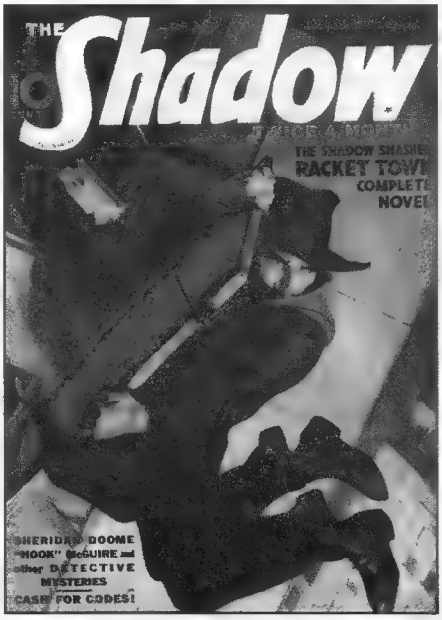
Solace For A Dime

Bursting forth from row after row of magazine racks, pulp magazines offered solace for a nation. A moment's escape from the darkness of reality, and a chance to embark upon a remarkable adventure. Television was still a dream of the future and motion pictures were an expensive form of entertainment for a working man and his family... but for the cost of a dime, a pulp magazine offered the average


THE STRANGE
CREATURE
IN BLACK
WEIRD
AVENGER
OF CRIME
TWICE A MONTH
10¢ READ
THE Shadow
MAGAZINE
THE SHADOW MAGAZINE & ALL SHADOW IMAGES © CONDE-NAST 1995

American the chance to rocket away on a tale of interplanetary adventure; commandeer a Bomber through a dangerous night mission; or explore the deepest recesses of the untamed African jungle.

The pulps offered every form of adventure imaginable, from the great American West to the gangland hideouts of the underworld. There were magazines of science fiction, fantasy, sports adventure, hard-boiled detective and the weird and the fantastic. Harry Steeger, the former president of Popular Publications, Inc., one of the leading publishers of pulp magazines summed it up thusly, "Pulps were the principle entertainment vehicle for millions of Americans. They were an unflickering, uncolored TV screen upon which the reader could spread the most glorious imagination he possessed."



The Start Of The Pulps

The pulp magazine came forth from the ingenious mind of a small publisher named Frank Munsey, who, in 1896, came to the realization that the story was more important than the paper that was used to publish it. Mainstream magazines at that time were lavishly illustrated, produced on slick-coated paper and contained a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. While many of them, such as Harper's or the Atlantic, produced fiction of high-quality, the cost of 25¢ an issue was prohibitive to the average American who earned little more than seven dollars for slaving 10-12 hours a day, six days a week in a sweat shop. Munsey, realized that in order to move more product, he had to mass produce his magazine at the lowest cost possible. With this thought in mind, he used the cheapest wood-pulp paper available to produce the first pulp, his all-fiction magazine, *The Argosy*. With its poor paper stock and uncut edges, Munsey knew that his magazine was a far cry from the "slicks" that permeated the market, and he didn't hope to capture the reading loyalty of the rich and educated who sneered at the "low-brow" and "uncouth" pulps. Rather, he appealed to the unsophisticated, working class reader. The bread winner of the emerging middle class. The man who wanted good entertainment for his family at a fair price. To say Munsey succeeded is an understatement. By 1907, *Argosy's* readership reached 500,000, while introducing to America the scripted works of Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, Joseph Conrad, and Rudyard Kipling. Other publishers immediately jumped into the foray, unleashing an onslaught of new publications, none more successful than Munsey's own follow-up, *All-Story,* which introduced the author Edgar Rice Burroughs. The era of the pulps had begun...

The Pulp Boom

The 1920's and 1930's saw a boom in pulp magazine production never before seen in the publishing world. Millions upon millions of pulps were printed and sold. As many as 250 different titles crowded the magazine stands at any given time. In order to keep costs down, profit margins per issue were incredibly small, therefore the whole industry revolved around selling as many units as possible.

Pulp writers churned out fantastic 60,000 word adventures on every topic imaginable, and when the costs of writing was too high, publishers went overseas and purchased stockpiles of used British stories from literary flea markets, and had their house writers refine the copy for American tastes. The fiction was violent and flamboyant... the covers were lurid... and the readers were drawn like flies to partially-clad women in distress amid a back drop of blazing guns, Oriental villians, and torture!

The action was sweaty. The danger was real. It was into this world that The Shadow was born.

Radical Measures

Henry William Ralston, the general manager of Street & Smith, the leading pulp publisher of the 1930's, had achieved enormous success with his magazines *Popular, Western Story,* and *Love Story*, but he became concerned when sales on his detective weekly, *Detective Story Magazine,* began to slump.

Since its inception in 1915, *Detective Story Magazine*, had stood alone as the leader in detective fiction. But by 1929, fierce competition by *Black Mask* and *Flynn's* had taken a large bite out of Street & Smith's dominance in the market. *Detective Story Magazine* countered by importing the works of Agatha Cristie and Edgar Wallace, but it wasn't enough to restore eroding sales. Finally, Street & Smith resorted to radical measures... they turned to radio!

Airing for the first time at 8:30 P.M., Eastern Standard time, on Thursday night, August 2, 1930, the "Detective Story Hour" featured a dramatization of a short story culled from its parent pulp magazine. Devised as an advertising scheme to lure new readers to the newsstand, the show proved to be a success and every Thursday night that followed, the narrator (an actor named James LaCurto) read another installment from the upcoming issue. What happened next wasn't exactly clear, as record

keeping in those early days of radio was extremely haphazard, but sometime in the fall of 1930, a radio writer, Harry Charlot, created a name for the previously anonymous narrator. He called him... The Shadow.

It's possible that the name was derived from a novelette titled, "The Shadow of Wall Street," published in February, 1929 in another Street & Smith magazine, *Fame and Fortune*. In this story, George C. Jenks (using the pen name Frank S. Lawton) scripted a tale of a mysterious figure who protected innocent investors from the clutches of evil financiers. The cover of this issue presented a mysterious hooded figure, while the prose commented on his "awful glittering eyes," and his "mocking laugh." Whether or not this mysterious character was the inspiration behind Charlot's creation of the name shall forever remain a mystery, as Charlot was murdered just a few years after The Shadow's inception, his body found in a Bowery flophouse. Regardless, the role of the "Detective Story Hour" narrator was changed dramatically and LaCurto subsequently began each episode with the now famous catch-phrase, "Crime does not pay. The Shadow knows," followed by a murderous, blood-curdling laugh.

Earth-Shattering Success

The radio promotion proved to be an earth-shattering success... perhaps too successful! The mocking laugh of The Shadow was so compelling that listeners completely misunderstood that the purpose of The Shadow was to promote *Detective Story Magazine*. The public clamored to have more of this fiendish creation and flocked to the magazine stands in droves to pick up the latest issue of *The Shadow*. The only problem was, no such magazine existed!

Quick to realize the quandary that he was in, Ralston ordered Frank Blackwell, the editor-in-chief of *Detective Story Magazine*, to orchestrate the creation of the magazine that the public wanted. Time was of the essence since it was essential that they capitalize on The Shadow while excitement over the radio show was strong, and perhaps more importantly, Street & Smith had to protect their copyright on the name before another publisher stole it out from under them. Ralston turned over an unpublished "Nick Carter" manuscript that he felt could be re-written to introduce the new character. He ordered the magazine to be issued on a trial quarterly basis, thereby allowing time to assess the public's enthusiasm for the magazine before committing to publish a second issue. With the basic premise established, all Blackwell needed was someone who could write the story under a nearly impossible deadline. Someone with a flare for words and adventure. Someone who could write incredibly fast. That someone was Walter B. Gibson!

Publishing History

In one of the most fortuitous events in publishing history, Walter B. Gibson, with portable typewriter in hand, chose that particular day in December of 1930 to stop by the office of Frank Blackwell. By 1930, Gibson had already established a career for himself as an authority on magic, having ghost-written material for the greatest magicians of the day, including Houdini, Blackstone, Thurston, and Dunninger. In addition, he had worked as a reporter for the Philadelphia North American and Evening Ledger and had dabbled in fiction and dramatic non-fiction by contributing articles to *Ghost Stories* and *True Detective*, as well as, editing *Tales of Magic and Mystery* and *True Strange Stories*.

In December of 1930, Gibson had completed a book titled, Houdini's Escapes, compiled from Houdini's personal notes, and had gone to New York to arrange for a sequel when, on a whim, he stopped by Street & Smith to sell some articles. In Gibson, Blackwell found the answer to his prayers. As an article writer with a talent for fiction, Gibson was capable of producing quality material under a tight deadline. Further, Gibson's experience in the realms of magic and the bizarre, brought a unique and imaginative angle to the Shadow's character. Blackwell discussed his ideas for The Shadow with Gibson, who prior to their meeting, had been considering writing his own mystery about a nebulous, mystical hero, adept in the ways of magic.

Gibson suggested an opening scene whereby a cloaked figure would emerge from the night fog to prevent a desperate young man from making a suicide plunge from a high bridge. Once saved, the young man would swear allegiance to his savior and unite with him in the war against crime. Blackwell decided to scrap the Nick Carter manuscript and gave Gibson the go ahead to write the 70,000 word piece, promising him three more novels on a quarterly basis should the first one prove satisfactory.

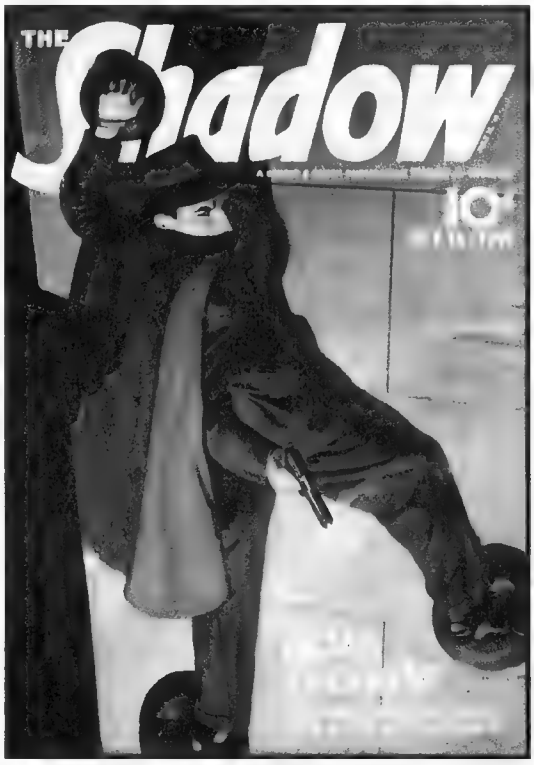
Returning to Philadelphia, Gibson unpacked his Underwood portable and got right to work. Being a seasoned newspaper man, he felt certain that he could tackle any writing assignment handed to him, but his experience with fiction was limited and he soon found himself puzzled over basic concerns such as the names of his characters and the length of his chapters. Gibson solved his problems by pulling a novel by Horatio Alger Jr. off his shelf and using it as the pattern for the first Shadow novel, down to the number of pages and use of chapter titles. Gibson quickly finished the first six chapters and returned to Blackwell's office with the total outline for approval. And it was a good thing he did.

Meanwhile Back At The Office...

In their rush to get the issue out onto the stands, and also in their desire not to invest much money into an untested product, the Street & Smith art department decided to reuse a previously published cover painting from *Thrill Book*, October 1, 1919. This painting, featuring a snarling Chinese man with arms upraised and casting a shadow on the wall behind him, was to be the cover for the first issue of *The Shadow*. The only problem was that it had absolutely nothing to do with the novel

that Gibson was scripting! Quickly, Gibson rushed home and worked an Oriental angle into the story to match the fantastic cover art.

By mid-January of 1931, Gibson delivered the final manuscript titled "Murder in the Next Room" (later changed to the more familiar "The Living Shadow"). Blackwell immediately authorized Gibson to write the next three installments of *The Shadow* novels and asked him to create a pen name for himself. It was common practice in those days for authors of novel series to operate under an assumed name, as it provided the publishers a means to maintain the appearance of continuity should their main writer move on to other material or be unable to meet a deadline. Gibson pondered this decision for a moment before he combined the names of two of his magic dealer acquaintances and created the Nom de plume, Maxwell Grant.



From that moment on, Maxwell Grant became the raconteur through which The Shadow revealed his latest battles in the war against crime. The first issue of *The Shadow* hit the stands in April of 1931 and was quickly gobbled up by the public. It featured the title, *The Shadow, A Detective Magazine,* and ran the slogan, "The Shadow Knows!" across the cover. The title page carried a portrait of a man in a slouch hat, announcing that the magazine was to be published quarterly. Many thought that this was an early drawing of The Shadow, but it was actually a true-to-life sketch of Blackwell which was put on the title page as a good-luck token since Blackwell's other magazines were such a success. As promised, the issue told the story of how The Shadow rescued Harry Vincent from suicide to become his agent in the war against crime. The issue concluded with a cryptic message on the back cover posing the question "Who is The Shadow?" All in all, rushed as it was, the debut of *The Shadow* was quite a success.

What Does A Shadow Look Like?

Gibson pounded out the plots for the next three novels with Blackwell and Ralston and once again returned home to write when the next problem arose. No one, including the editors and the publisher, knew what The Shadow looked like. Prior to the release of the first issue, Ralston had conceived a promotional "Guess what the Shadow looks like" contest. Offering a $500 first prize, clues such as, "By the mark of the cobra on my chest," began running weekly on the radio show and later in print in *Detective Story Magazine.* The correct answer, proposed by a loyal Shadow fan John G. Porter, described the Shadow as forty years old, blond haired and tattooed with a cobra across his chest. The fact that this "winning" description bears absolutely no resemblance to The Shadow that graced the pulp pages, can be attributed completely to Gibson, who saw the list of clues prior to beginning his first novel and promptly ignored them. In his book, *The Shadow* was an intangible creature of the night, a nebulous figure who moved into and out of the shadows, a spectacular make-up/quick change artist, and therefore, was better left faceless.

By the time the contest results were published in the July 25, 1931 issue of *Detective Story Magazine*, Gibson had already penned the next three novels and Blackwell commissioned him to begin four more to complete another year of the quarterly publication. In none of these novels did Gibson make reference to the contest's winning response. But rather than confuse readers, the fact that no one knew what the Shadow looked like didn't detract from his popularity, and may have actually served to heighten the mystery surrounding the magazine.

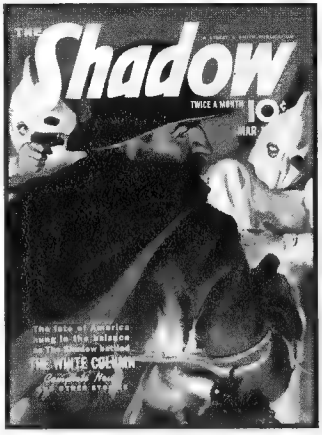
It's A Sellout!

The first issue of *The Shadow* sold out completely and orders for the second were doubled. Gibson found the time to complete his work with Houdini's notes and finish a book for Blackstone ("Modern Card Tricks"), before he sat down to begin work on this new assignment for Blackwell. The second *Shadow* novel, "The Eyes of the Shadow," hit the stands in July, and was such a success that Street & Smith decided to go monthly with the third issue. Gibson continued to churn out novels at the rate of one a month and by February of 1932 he had scripted his twelfth novel and found himself a full five months ahead of printing schedule.

In retrospect, he soon found that he needed every minute of that five month cushion because *The Shadow's* success was so overwhelming that Street & Smith, noting that sales were strongest within the first

two weeks of an issues release, decided to take the magazine biweekly. On March 1, 1932, Street & Smith offered Gibson a contract to deliver two novels a month for the next year, thus beginning one of the most remarkable tales of writing endurance ever recorded.

Armed with a new Smith-Corona portable typewriter, which was one of the first to come out with a single shift, Gibson set out to write twenty-four Shadow stories in one year. At a rate of 60,000 words per story, that meant 1,440,000 words. Working closely with his new editor, John Nanovic, he began pounding out first drafts at the rate of four pages an hour! Gibson commented that it took him a day or two to get warmed up to a new story, but then he soon would hit top speed, working 10-12 hours a day, cranking out forty to fifty pages.



Often times he concluded an all-night session by finishing the story on the train from Philadelphia to New York, before turning the manuscript in for a reading session that afternoon. After the reading he would confer with Nanovic and Ralston to discuss the plot for the next novel.

Gibson's life boiled down to two week periods, each of three days travel and recreation, three days for plotting with Nanovic and eight days to write the novel. *The Shadow Magazine* went biweekly with the October 1, 1932 issue, "Green Eyes." Gibson continued at his breakneck pace, sometimes finishing a novel in as little as five days, churning out 15,000 words or 60 typewritten pages a day. "By living, thinking, even dreaming the story in one continued process," he once said, "I found ideas came faster and faster."

Gibson typed so fast that rumors have it at one point he positioned four typewriters around his room, so that he could work on a fresh one while the used one cooled down. Whether or not that is true, it is a fact that often he would type until his fingertips became bloody and sore. At one point, while he was having a new house built and was surveying the construction site, he felt the pressure of the deadline set in, pulled up a crate and typed out a story right there amidst the bustling of the construction crew... an amazing feat of concentration!

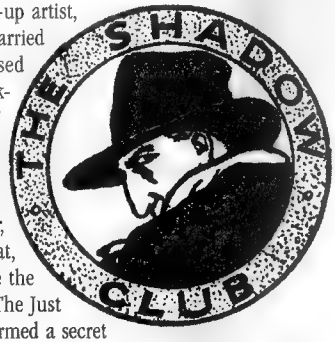
The New World's Record

Street & Smith rewarded Gibson's efforts by running a full page ad with his picture on it, celebrating the new world's record of 1,440,000 words written in one year. By Gibson's account, however, he had already written the first four novels of the next year and was finishing his fifth the very day of the one year anniversary, thereby moving the record to 1,740,000 words in one year. Gibson continued at this pace on various projects for several years. *The Shadow* was published biweekly from October 1, 1932 until March 1, 1943, then reverted back to a monthly format. In all, three hundred and twenty-five issues, plus three annuals were printed. Of these, 282 were scripted by Gibson, 27 by Theodore Tinsley, 15 by Bruce Elliot, and one by Lester Dent (later revised by Gibson), all under the name of Maxwell Grant.

That *The Shadow* succeeded at all, given this remarkable production schedule, its hasty introduction, and commercially exploitive birth, is a testament to the incredible imagination of Walter B. Gibson, and the close working relationship that he established with his editor, John Nanovic and publisher Henry Ralston. With his unending creativity and complex plotlines, Gibson breathed new life into a genre–the single hero story– that had died and laid moribund since the demise of the dime novels at the turn of the century. Like the pulps, the dime novels were cheap, popular fiction that was made readily available to the public during the late 1800's. Also like the pulps, the dime novels contained tales of intense action and spicy adventure. Buffalo Bill was perhaps the quintessential dime novel hero, but Nick Carter and Frank Merriwell were also born from this genre.

From its inception, *The Shadow's* dime novel roots were undeniably clear. Henry Ralston was himself a big fan of the single hero dime novels, and Gibson and Nanovic borrowed heavily from established heroes to create their character. It must be remembered, that Gibson and Nanovic were given the unsavory assignment of creating an entire world around nothing more than a menacing voice that appeared briefly on the radio. To do this, they referred back to the heroes that came before them. Nick Carter, introduced in 1888, was an independently wealthy private detective that successfully solved crimes that foiled the police. Carter was a master of science and languages, an adept make-up artist, and a master athlete. He carried two guns, which he used liberally, a tool kit and a pick-lock, that he and his "aides" used to battle a multitude of evil criminal geniuses. Zorro, created in 1919, was the son of a wealthy hacienda owner, who by night donned a hat, cape and mask to become the riding avenger in black. The Just Men, first seen in 1905, formed a secret organization to battle men and organizations that were beyond the reach of the law and bring them to justice.

RARE AND COLLECTIBLE emblem worn by members of the Shadow Club!



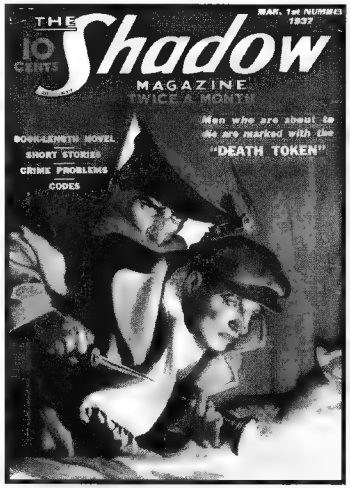
Even The Shadow's method of borrowing other's identities, such as that of Lamont Cranston, had a dime novel origin as Sir George Trevor,

published in 1910, was actually an American that assumed Trevor's identity when the original Trevor died.

Heir To A Legacy

The Shadow's place as heir to this legacy is clear. In essence, he was a direct descendent of Nick Carter and Zorro, with a touch of Trevor and the Just Men thrown in. Sort of a Zorro of the big city. A Zorro with guns. But in reality, he was so much more.

In the very first novel, Gibson set us upon a path of unparalleled adventure, establishing that The Shadow was the head of a secret organization bent on purging crime from the city and introducing us to someone who will become one of The Shadow's most versatile agents, Harry Vincent. We discovered that The Shadow was a master manipulator of men, an expert safe-cracker/lock-picker, an adept disguise artist and a communications master, skilled at codes and encrypted information. We were confounded by The Shadow's true identity, learning that no one knew who The Shadow was, but that he may have been a W.W.I aviator/spy who's face was wounded in the war. The Shadow was a nebulous figure. A haunting vision in black.



This first issue also introduced the reader to The Shadow's hidden sanctum, the soon to be familiar desk of policeman Joe Cardona, and the Jonas office on 23rd street where secret communications were left and somehow ended up in The Shadow's hands. All of this information came to us amid the sulfur tinged air of spent automatic cartridges and the pulsing heat of The Shadow in action. As the series unfolded, it became clear that The Shadow was more than just a make-up artist, he was actually a gifted actor, a blank slate upon which any personality could be worn at any time. When The Shadow went undercover, he did more than just wear a face, he adopted an entire personality. He became an entirely different person.

This was never more apparent than in The Shadow's role as Lamont Cranston. While the radio show was later to state that The Shadow was in reality Lamont Cranston, wealthy man about town, Gibson had a different idea altogether. Cranston was actually just another personality that The Shadow adopted, another guise that he used in his war against crime.

Cranston was, however, just one of the many personae that The Shadow adopted. At various times The Shadow appeared as George Clarendon, a wealthy playboy and amateur criminologist; Phineas Twambley, a doddering old gentleman; Fritz, a dim-witted police janitor or Henry Arnaud, a typically Gibsonesque eccentric businessman, to name just a few. The Shadow was capable of producing whatever persona was most crucial to the case he was working. He could slip into enemy territory unseen or appear in the company of the police at just the right moment to learn a critical bit of information. The Shadow could change personae as effortlessly as we change our shoes, and this proved to be a point of never-ending fascination for the reader.

Lamont Cranston Or Kent Allard?

Throughout all of this, the one bit of information that Gibson carefully withheld from the reader was the real identity of The Shadow. With "The Shadow Unmasks," April 1, 1937, Gibson finally answered this question by introducing the persona of Kent Allard, a former W.W.I flying ace, known as the Dark Eagle, who had been lost during the war. Allard confessed that after he was shot down, he became a roving agent, liberating POW's from secret prison camps. When he learned of the wave of crime sweeping over America, he did the only thing a noble American citizen could do. He flew to South America, obliterated his identity, adopted the role of Lamont Cranston and organized a first-class crime fighting operation.

Thus was born The Shadow. Or so we are led to believe.

The persona of Allard reappeared throughout *The Shadow's* run, but unfortunately, he became less clear with time. As The Shadow radio show began its popular run in 1937, pressure began mounting to keep The Shadow as Lamont Cranston, thereby not confusing fans of the radio show who picked up their first pulp. By 1939, Allard was reduced to a minor role, and Cranston became more closely associated with The Shadow. Finally, in 1948, Gibson committed the only major break in continuity over his extraordinary run and stated that Allard was just a persona that The Shadow used when he grew tired of being Cranston. The circle had come 360 degrees and we still didn't know where we started. The Shadow was Cranston who was Allard who was Cranston who was the Shadow. Perhaps, not even The Shadow knew.

The Shadow's Agents

Supporting characters played an important role in *The Shadow* novels as well. Whether, a freshly recruited agent, perfectly suited for a dangerous mission, or a bumbling police commissioner that would unwittingly provide The Shadow with information, Gibson introduced an array of conflicting personalities into the series.

The cast of supporting characters developed from the very first novel, as Joe Cardona, the Italian-American detective, Harry Vincent, the first of The Shadow's agents to be recruited, and Claude Fellows, The Shadow's contact man who sent and received messages, made their first appearances. These early issues had The Shadow as an almost

peripheral character, waiting in the wings and plotting as his agents (proxy heroes) did the investigative groundwork. At critical points, The Shadow launched into motion, rescued the proxy hero from whatever terrible trouble he had become entwined, and defeated the villain.

Later issues saw The Shadow becoming a more central figure in the stories, but the posse of agents continued to grow, introducing some wonderful personalities to the pulp pages. Future issues would introduce Burbank, the communications master who sat immobile at his console, armed only with a pair of earphones; Clyde Burke, the New York crime reporter; Cliff Marsland, The Shadow's connection to the underworld; and Vic Marquette, a secret service operative who was so entwined with The Shadow's activities that he, like Joe Cardona, was essentially an agent. Other agents and characters appeared as they were needed, including Ralph Weston, the police commissioner; Rutledge Mann, the failed business man who assembled news data for The Shadow; Moe Shrevnitz (later called Shrevvy), The Shadow's cab driving chauffeur; and a network of connections in Chinatown.

The agents all knew of one another, but not one of them knew the identity of their master, The Shadow.

Before Margo Lane

Women played a minimal role in The Shadow's life until "The Teeth of The Dragon," published November 15, 1937, when Gibson introduced Myra Reldon. Myra, an undercover federal agent, occasionally donned make-up to become Ming Dawn, a beautiful oriental woman. She was a cool professional, who became an agent of The Shadow, and proved invaluable in combating Oriental menaces like Shiwan Kahn.

With the June 15, 1941 issue, "The Thundering King," Gibson reluctantly bowed to corporate pressure and introduced Margo Lane to the pulp series. The young socialite, who was a mainstay of the radio show, successfully became the woman in peril from her very first appearance and never transcended this role throughout her life in the magazine. She was never popular with the readers, who favored a harder-edged Shadow than appeared on the radio, but nevertheless, she stayed until the bitter end.

Villains & Evil Devices

Perhaps Gibson's greatest contribution to *The Shadow* was the fantastic array of villains and evil devices that he poured into the magazine. Once again, the concept of an evil genius bent on world domination was not original to *The Shadow Magazine*. In 1913, Sax Rohmer, began successfully parlaying the concept into a popular run of novels depicting the villainy of Fu Manchu, who used swarms of loyal minion warriors, drugs, poisons and his own incredible intellect to wage a campaign of terror across the world. Gibson, borrowed this concept and, once again, twisted and molded it to fit his own needs. In doing so he created such radical evil geniuses as The Red Envoy, the first of Gibson's many masked villains. The Red Envoy ("The Red Menace," November, 1931) murdered everyone in his path in order to get the secret plans for an aerial torpedo, before he was eventually bested by The Shadow.

Many villains followed, such as The Black Master, Mox, The Gray Fist, Zemba, The Black Falcon, and The Cobra. Each villain came equipped with his own secret identity, incredible criminal intellect and hell-bent plan for destruction involving a multitude of secret weapons such as "The Silent Death," an electric ray machine that dealt out death on a massive scale, or "The Black Hush," an ingenious machine that cast out a cone of pure darkness capable of negating electromagnetic activity, making alarm systems obsolete and casting the city into blackout.

The Shadow's Greatest Villain

Undeniably, The Shadow's greatest villain was Shiwan Kahn, the direct descendent of the infamous Ghengis Kahn, who felt that it was his birthright to rule the world. From his first appearance in "The Golden Master," published September 15, 1939, it was apparent that Shiwan Kahn possessed all the same hypnotic and mystical powers that empowered The Shadow. Shiwan Kahn's battles with The Shadow spanned over three more issues ("Shiwan Kahn Returns," "The Invisible Shiwan Kahn" and "Masters of Death") and proved to be one of the highlights of an incredibly successful magazine run.

Shiwan Kahn was pure evil, without even the slightest trace of humanity, constantly plotting world domination. Each battle forced The Shadow to extend himself to the limits of his endurance before he successfully thwarted Shiwan's plans. Finally, in "Masters of Death," (May 15, 1940) The Shadow and

Shiwan battle to the death in a fiery scene that leaves only The Shadow still standing.

The Shadow battled these geniuses with his multitude of skills, agents and his trusty automatic pistols, two Colt .45's Model 1911A. No matter how great the intellect of the evil genius, The Shadow's was greater. He out manipulated them, out guessed them, out maneuvered them. No matter how secret they thought their plans were, The Shadow knew. The Shadow employed exploding powders, wall-crawling suction cups, a boomerang, and his famous girasol ring. Gibson borrowed upon his years of magic experience and empowered The Shadow with almost Houdini-like powers, which he used often to effect miraculous escapes. As the novels progressed, the stories became often more violent, with both of The Shadow's .45's blazing a path of vengeance into the night. But, perhaps The Shadow's greatest weapon was the one that created him. The laugh. The menacing, haunting laugh that burst across the sky at his arrival and drove terror into the hearts of the evil. It was the Golden Days of The Shadow.

Theodore Tinsley

Like all successful endeavors, *The Shadow* was soon copied by other publishers hoping to cash in on his success. The Phantom Detective, The Spider, Operative 5, Secret Agent X, Wu Fang and The Green Lama immediately hit the newsstand, marking the beginning of the single character renaissance. Street & Smith even capitalized on the success of the genre, creating an expanded line of character magazines, featuring Nick Carter and introducing their newest adventure character, Doc Savage, whose popularity would rival that of even The Shadow. By 1936, Gibson was contracted to prepare scripts and plots for The Shadow radio show, while still under contract to script The Shadow's novel episodes. Realizing that even the durable Gibson could eventually falter, the publishers hired Theodore Tinsley to script four novels a year to ease Gibson's burden.

Tinsley's Shadow was faithful to Gibson's vision in every way, thanks to the watchful eye of editor John Nanovic, who remained vigilant of continuity and prevented glaring mistakes and contradictions from entering *The Shadow*'s pages. Tinsley did, however, introduce his own feeling to the character. From the first novel, "Partners of Peril" published November 1, 1936, Tinsley, an accomplished pulp fiction writer with prior work in Action Stories and Black Mask, introduces his pages with strong undercurrent of sexual danger and partially-clad, or frankly naked women. His Shadow was more fallible, narrowly escaping death one adventure at a time. The stories were more violent, with wave after wave of danger assaulting The Shadow without the complexity of plot that Gibson introduced. Torture and sadomasochism became real in these stories, always told amidst the cacophony of detonating explosions and blazing automatics. Tinsley's novels were warmly received by the public and became an established part of The Shadow's history.

The Avenger Was Born

Single-title characters continued to thrive and Gibson introduced a new magazine to showcase various characters. *Crime Busters* proved to be a success, and Gibson, under the name of Maxwell Grant to attract Shadow readers to the new magazine, added the production of eight "Margot the Magician" stories a year to his lengthy writing list. Street & Smith, not yet satisfied with their enormous success, wanted to add another title to their run of single character magazines, and asked Gibson and Lester Dent to work together to develop a new character combining the talents of The Shadow and Doc Savage. From this meeting of the minds, The Avenger was born and launched in his own magazine, written by Paul Ernst under the name of Kenneth Robeson.

Comes The Fall

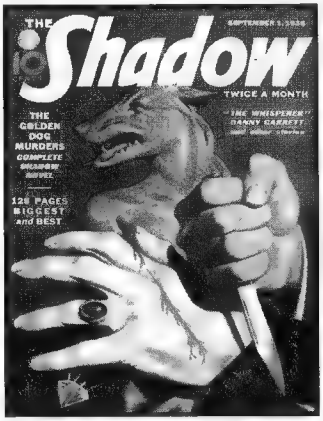
The Shadow's success at this time was unfathomable. He transcended every medium, appearing not only on radio, but in comic strips, comic books, and Big Little books, as well as on the movie screen in several films, plus a 15-chapter serial. He became a household name-like dominating the Sunday, 5:30 p.m. time slot on the radio, appearing twice a month in his own magazine, plus embellishing everything from games to toys to household products.

Like all successful endeavors, however, there eventually came a fall, and with *The Shadow*, the beginning of the fall was signaled by the introduction of Margo Lane in the pulps in 1941. Stories from that point on were never able to capture the magic of the Golden Years from 1931 to 1939. Fewer supporting characters were introduced, fewer menacing villains, and fewer new plot lines. The radio shows influence became more prominent in the pulps, as drama were wrung out of the pulp creativity.

Clyde Burke's identity as The Shadow was no longer a secret from the agents, Moe Shrevnitz, the competent cab driver, was reduced to the popular radio bumbler Shrevvy, and (although Gibson never completely lowered himself to the radio's gimmick) hints were dropped that at times The Shadow had the power to cloud men's minds to become invisible. Oversaturation had declared the end was near for The Shadow, and without mystery, there was no Shadow.

So Long John Nanovic

In 1943, paper shortages associated with W.W.II forced *The Shadow* to return to a monthly format and a new digest size. While this proved to be too confining a format for the expansive tales that Gibson liked to weave, the one move that proved most fatal to *The Shadow's* success was the firing of John Nanovic as editor. At this time, pulp sales were down across the board and several Street & Smith editors were lost to the military draft. Reader's tastes had changed from the violent world of the 1930's, and the pulps were unable to make the transition swiftly enough to maintain their popularity. Street & Smith began instituting a sweeping realignment of their offices to focus their attention on publishing women's magazines, and moved the pulps to the back burner.



The editorial changes that followed in *The Shadow Magazine*, killed the momentum initially created by Ralston, Nanovic, and Gibson. The number of words allotted to *The Shadow* stories was reduced from 60,000 to 45,000, which cramped Gibson's atmospheric writing and didn't allow him space to develop his complex plots. The stories were reduced to violent action burners from start to finish without the trademark Gibsonesque twists and turns. The new editorial board dictated that Gibson focus his writing on whodunits based around Cranston and Margo, forcing him to abandon evil geniuses, the sanctum, and the agents.

So Long Walter Gibson

In 1946, Babette Rosemund, a woman who soundly disliked the pulp tradition, took over as editor of The Shadow. At this time, Gibson was involved in a contract dispute with Street & Smith, regarding his role as creator of The Shadow. In a moment of absolute corporate near-sightedness, Street & Smith unceremoniously fired him, informing him by letter that they had found a new man to become Maxwell Grant.

With that note, the man who had created The Shadow was dropped from the title. The writing chores were turned over to Bruce Elliot, under the direction of Rosemund. Rosemund's vision significantly altered the course and direction of the magazine. *The Shadow Magazine* of the thirties was replaced with *Shadow Mystery* which featured cutting edge mystery fiction. While the writing in this new pulp was palpable, the major problem was that The Shadow no longer existed in it.

Instead, Lamont Cranston became the hero, solving mysteries with the police. All hints of a secret identity were ignored and The Shadow lost all his superhuman qualities. His guns remained holstered, his laugh rarely pealed across the pages. Removed were the cast of supporting characters and the villains, the agents and the gadgets, the Shadow's laugh and his blazing .45's. Fifteen years of Gibson's creativity, obliterated in a single stroke.

Elliot wrote fifteen Shadow novels between March, 1946 and January, 1948. In 1947 the magazine fell back to bimonthly and then to quarterly as sales continued to fall. Eventually, William de Grouchy took the editorship away from Rosemund and immediately turned to Gibson to help restore the magazine. Gibson responded with a return to the inspired stories of the early 1930's, but by then the die had already been cast.

So Long Shadow

In the summer of 1949, *The Shadow* magazine folded. With the publication of "Whispering Eyes," in the summer of 1949, the tales of The Shadow came to a close. While a few attempts to resurrect the character onto the printed page were made, they never succeeded in living up to the tradition established by the man who typed 10-12 hours a day on a beat up Corona typewriter amid the banging and hammering of a construction crew.

William B. Gibson was, for all intents and purposes, The Shadow. He was the blood running through The Shadow's veins, the index finger twitching on his .45 automatics, and the terror resounding in his laugh.

The Shadow was the rarest of creations. The pulp magazines were never meant to last forever. Publishers churned them out as quickly and as inexpensively as possible. The stories weren't meant to be literature, but read quickly with the cover folded back on itself, passed from hand to hand and then thrown away. Story line continuity wasn't important, only the sales of the issue at hand. The entire medium existed solely to produce a profit. Yet, somehow Gibson elevated *The Shadow* beyond all this. His tales created a lasting world of adventure and excitement. His characters became real and touched our hearts with their successes and failures. His Shadow became an enduring literary figure, instantly recognizable and completely original.

With Gibson's passing, all hopes of a return to the grand tradition of The Shadow have passed and left us with only memories of Gibson's incredible imagination. Memories lost in boxes of water-damaged pages... tucked away in an attic or basement. Memories entombed on musty yellowing folios of brittle wood pulp. Memories that lie hidden behind torn and faded covers with taped spines. Oh, but what memories they are... ■

This article was supplied by the The Comic Archives,an independent shoppe dedicated to the exploration and analysis of comic book history, popular culture, collectibles and nostalgia. Special thanks to authors Todd Severin and Keith Holt for their excellent and well researched article on The Shadow. Comic Archives is independently owned and operated by Phil Barnhart and Scotty Moore, collectors, researchers, and authors in their own right.

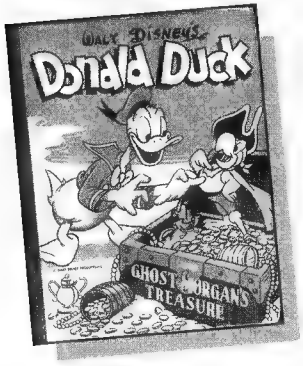
BIG Little BARKS

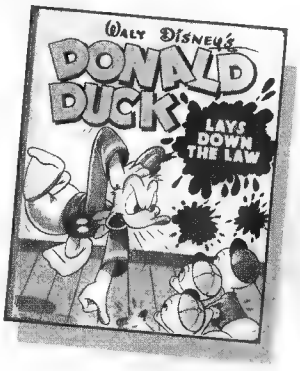
BY MICHAEL NAIMAN

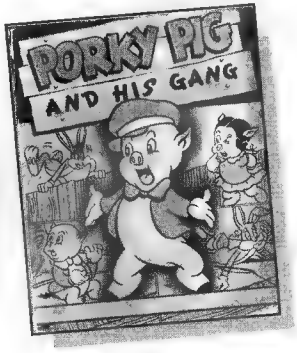
How frustrated can a completist-collector get? Let me tell you... plenty! Completists are a "rare breed" today because of the high cost of many hard to find rare issues in long running titles. For the Barks duck collector, being a completist can mean that you might have to collect reprints that can appear in some very unusual and imaginative formats! One of the most enjoyable reproductions of Barks' comic work can be found in the Big Little Book series.

Big Little Books first appeared in 1933, in the heart of the Depression, the same year that the first comic books were being tested. Samuel Lowe, who headed the creative marketing and sales staff at Whitman, has been credited with the creation of these books. The story goes that Sam frequently went into the shop to get a firsthand view of what the equipment could do. On one trip through the bindery, he saw strips or blocks of paper falling from lifts of printed sheets on the cutter. It seemed to him that this paper was being wasted. For the next few days, he walked around the office asking people if they thought that this would make a nice book.

The rest is history. The first shipments went into nearby Milwaukee stores late in the year and, reportedly, phones started to ring off the wall. Of course, the end papers were not used except for initial dummies... but they were the source of the idea that created the Big Little Books. In the beginning, famous newspaper strips were adapted to the Big Little Book format, followed by popular movies, classic novels, and some original material. Whitman's library of previously published stories proved to be a real "treasure chest" of resources for their initial BLB offerings... and Barks' stories were no exception to this rule.







The Big Little Book #1486 (1945)

The first Barks Big Little Book was #1486 (1945) "Donald Duck Up in the Air". It contained an adaptation of "Donald Duck in Frozen Gold" from *Four Color* #62 (January, 1945). And, just like the comic, it also has a second Barks classic, "Mystery of the Swamp", which was the backup story in *Four Color* #62.

The Big Little Book #1411 (1946)

The second Barks Big Little Book has a bit of history behind it. As any Barks fan will tell you, Carl's first comic book, *Four Color* #9 (August, 1942) featured "Donald Duck Finds Pirate Gold". This historic comic book was adapted from the never completed Disney feature cartoon "Morgan's Ghost" with Mickey, Donald, Goofy, and Pegleg Pete its intended stars. Because of the impending conversion to war production, this animated project was shelved. Later, Barks and Jack Hannah were given a script and (along with Bob Karp) did a masterful job adapting the story to comic book format. Four years later, Whitman produced Big Little Book #1411 (1946) "Donald Duck and Ghost Morgan's Treasure", which reprinted the now famous *Four Color* #9.

The Big Little Book #1404 (1946)

That same year Big Little Book #1404 (1946) "Porky and His Gang" hit the stands, with a reprint adaptation of "Porky of the Mounties" which was originally published in *Four Color* #48 (July, 1944). Like its comic book counterpart, this BLB is the only non-Disney Barks offering.

Other books adapting Barks stories were published in the years to follow. As the comic market began its shift away from heroes and as that new invention TV began its erosion of newsstand sales, Barks adaptations were still being printed, and most importantly... still selling! Later entries included:

The Big Little Book #1432 (1947)

"Donald Duck and the Green Sea Serpent" was published in 1947 and reprinted an adaptation of "Donald Duck in Terror of the River" originally released as *Four Color* #108 (April, 1946).

Big Little Book #1449 (1948)

"Donald Duck Lays Down the Law" - a reprint adaptation of seven 10-page Donald Duck stories from *Walt Disney Comics and Stories* #50 (November, 1944), #54 (March, 1945), #56 (May, 1945), #58 (July, 1945), #60 (September, 1945), #69 (June, 1946), and #70 (July, 1946).

Big Little Book #1457 (1949)

"Donald Duck in Volcano Valley" - adapting "Donald Duck in Volcano Valley" from *Four Color* #147 (May, 1947).

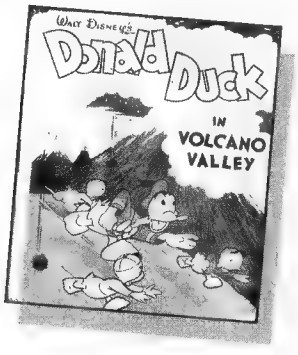
New Better Little Book #705-10 (1949)

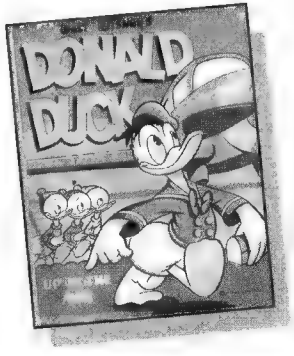
"Donald Duck and the Mystery of the Double X" - an adaptation of "Donald Duck in Sheriff of Bullet Valley" *Four Color* #199 (October, 1948). It should be noted that this series differed from the regular series in that they measured approximately five and one-half inches tall by three inches wide and contained fewer pages.

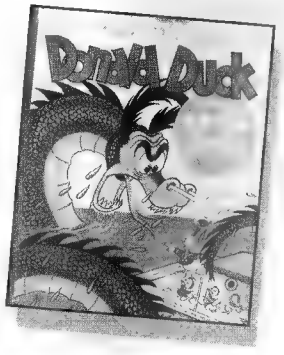
Lesser known formats also included Barks material. For example, an interesting "cousin" to the BLB is a series of Whitman publications called "A Whitman Comic Book." They consisted of a series of hardcover, black and white books measuring seven and three-quarters inches by five and three-quarter inches and contained 136 pages.

First published in September, 1962 the series included (#1) Yogi Bear, (#2) Huckleberry Hound, (#3) The Flintstones, (#4) Snooper & Blabber Fearless Detectives/Quickdraw McGraw of the Wild West, (#6) Mr. Jinks and Pixie & Dixie, (#7) Augie Doggie & Loopy de

BIG LITTLES







Barks Litho a sell-out at Disneyland!

UNCLE SCROOGE AND BEAGLE BOYS ©WALT DISNEY 1995

FASTER THAN YOU CAN SAY "NUMBER One Dime", the latest Carl Barks lithograph, "Invasion of Privacy," sold out its limited edition run of 300 on Sunday, August 20th,1995 at the Disneyland Hotel's Garden Room. The lithograph was developed from a recently completed 9" x 11 1/4" watercolor work by Barks depicting Scrooge in his Money Bin, reading the latest Beagle Boys headline, while startled by a mysterious and menacing drill. The Disney Gallery sponsored the event starring none other than the "Old Duck Man" himself, Carl Barks. Carl was there to sign the lithos as well as to pose for numerous photos with fans and admirers.

Among those in attendance were long time Barks fans Malcolm Willits, Mike Autry, Dana Gabbard, Former Disney editor Bob Foster, Ex-Los Angeles Dodger and talk show host Wes Parker. Husband and wife collecting team, Susan and Ken Musch, flew in all the way from Washington state for the gala event . Also in attendance were Donald Price and William Lipsky (of San Francisco), art dealers Terry Taylor and Tom Horvitz, and collectors Al Capps, Dave Grisez, Bob Wilson, and brothers Ed and David Wickburg.

While the event started at 1:00 PM, some enterprising (and patient) fans showed up as early as 8:00 AM to ensure a place near the front of the line! A sumptuous buffet was provided for attendees and there was plenty of time afterwards to "talk ducks" with new acquaintances and old friends.

Museum Of Cartoon Art Special Event Announcement

FRIENDS AND FANS OF CARL BARKS WILL want to mark November 6th, 1995, on their calendars. Nationally known collector and long time Barks fan, Peter Merolo, will be hosting a benefit dinner for the Museum of Cartoon Art. The culinary extravaganza will be held at his popular restaurant, MJ's Supper Club, in New York.

There have been unconfirmed reports that another Barks lithograph will be provided to all attendees, similar to the previous fund raising dinner for the Museum held at Disneyland earlier this year. A print of the Barks lithograph that was released at the West coast dinner (Black Gold! Yellow Gold!) recently fetched an amazing $850 at auction.

Those wishing to make reservations for this special event should contact Fritz Jellinghaus at (407) 391-2200. The donation for the dinner (which is tax deductible) will help fund the Museum of Cartoon Art currently still under construction in Boca Raton, Florida.

Last years event was a sell out, so if you're considering attending the dinner, make your reservation early! ■

Barks and friend at lithograph signing

UNCLE SCROOGE ©WALT DISNEY 1995

Loop, and (#8) Bugs Bunny.

Most important to Barks fans, #5 has Donald Duck by the "Old Duck Man" himself. This fifth issue features (once again) adaptations of *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* #209-213, plus one complete Mickey Mouse serial by Paul Murry, and (oddly enough) one Mickey Mouse serial missing the first episode.

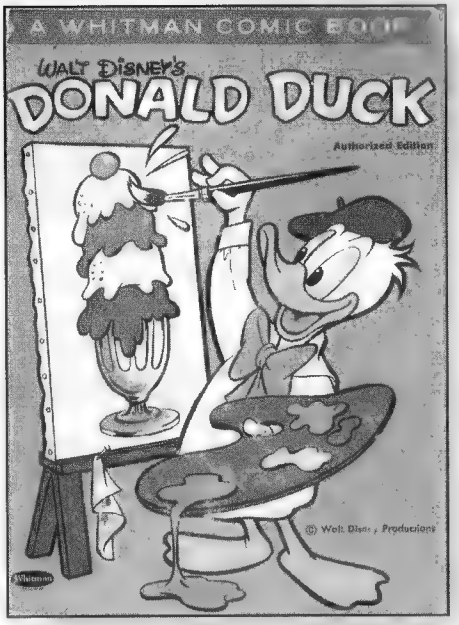
These "little gems made for little hands" are a fascinating sidelight in the world of Barks collectibles and are high on the want lists of many hard core Barks collectors. Luckily for the completist, fine condition copies of all of the books can usually be obtained for a reasonable sum… between $25-$45 each.

While BLBs are extremely difficult to locate in unread and mint condition, the real fun in these books is knowing that when you do find one (usually in a very read condition) you know that someone spent many happy hours exploring and being entertained by the wonderful storytelling experience of these Big Little "Barks" Books. Happy Duck hunting… ■

PAGE 30 & 31
(From left to right) BLB 1411, BLB 1449, BLB 1404, BLB 1457, BLB 1486, and BLB 1432.

WHITMAN COMIC BOOK
(At right) Donald "tickles his palette" as he paints his favorite dessert.

BIG LITTLE BOOKS ©WESTERN PUBL., DONALD DUCK ©WALT DISNEY 1995, PORKY PIG ©WARNER BROS. 1995



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11-15	10.00	11.50	12.25	14.25	22.00	37.75
16-20	11.50	13.50	14.50	17.75	25.50	48.75
21-25	14.00	15.25	17.75	19.25	28.50	65.50
26-30	15.25	17.00	19.75	22.00	29.00	75.00
31-35	17.50	19.75	22.00	25.75	30.00	84.50
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[illegible] there's his **History of Comics**. He was the guy who [illegible]ated what pulp was all [illegible] the roots of comics [illegible] how it led to the comics [illegible]eir heroes. He elevated [illegible]ole complex chronology [illegible]ics into a *readable* [illegible]y without being [illegible]ane or belittling. He's [illegible]r and his taste, [illegible]ent, and knowledge of [illegible] is impeccable [illegible]! [illegible] he's a great art [illegible]. Take his magazine, **PREVIEW**. From my viewpoint, [illegible]s of what to print [illegible]p images, what [illegible] how with his stories [illegible]

[illegible] it's Steranko the artist—whom I really love! Even when he was very young and working at Marvel, his cutting patterns on SHIELD were revolutionary. How he put one panel against another and redefined the page was different than anyone else at the time; he was extraordinarily creative. He's one of the top talents in the comics industry, both intellectually and artistically.

I met Steranko as a young man—we were both young and angry—while I was at Paramount on Terrytoons, my first job in animation. I hired him as a storyboard artist to develop things for me, but the studio closed down before we could get going. I have a very high regard for Jim's potential direction ability. Very early on, I wanted badly to work with Jim because of his cutting patterns and how he'd direct action. Eisner, Steranko, and Kubert—incredible page directors! Very few guys have that.

As both a cartoonist and film maker, I look for both drawing and cutting patterns, and Steranko's patterns got me very excited. As far as I'm concerned, he *equalled* Eisner. Absolutely! They didn't tell the same type of stories, but Steranko's cutting patterns were amazing. He always pushes the envelope when it comes to experimenting, and his work at Marvel was experimental as hell!!

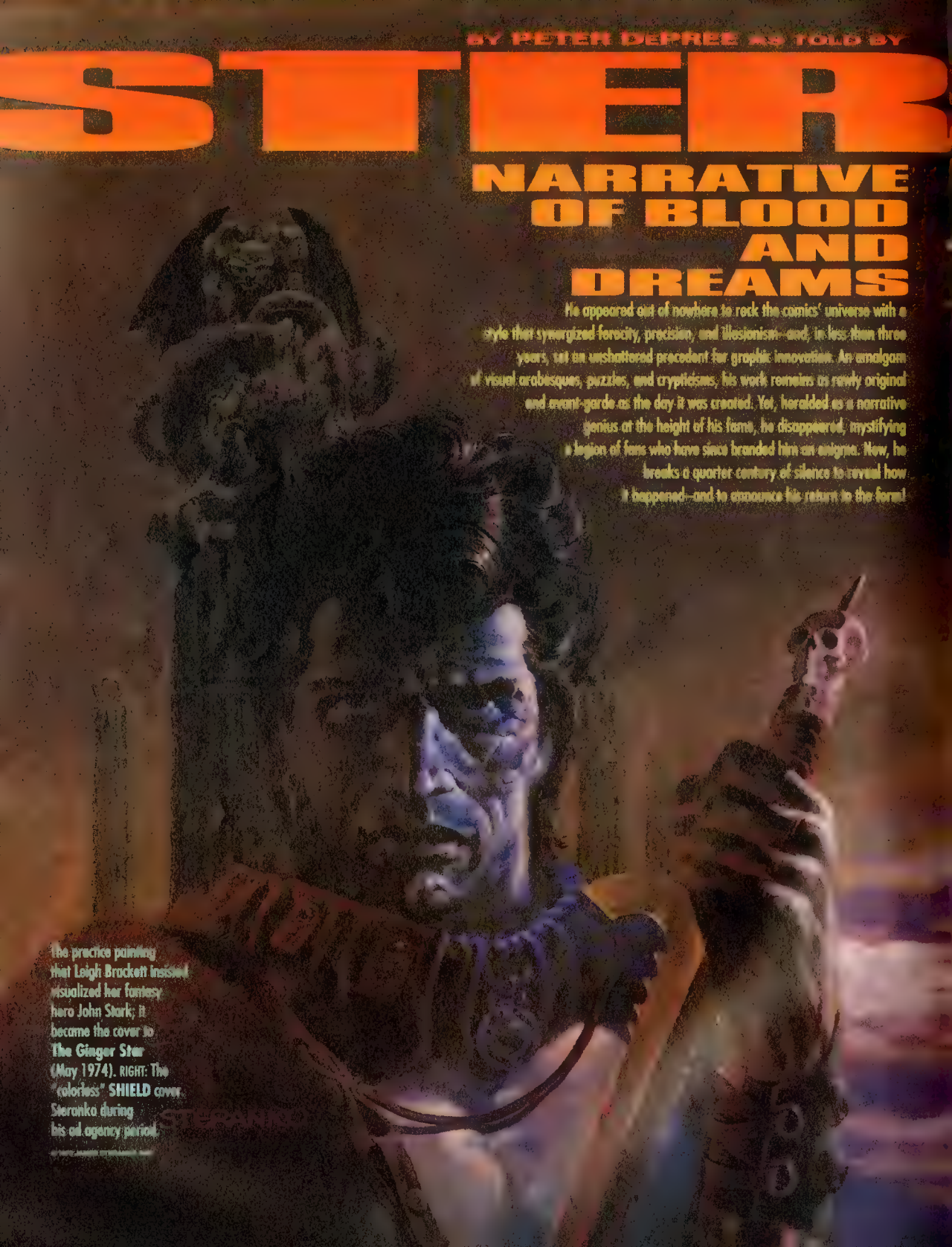
BAKSHI ON STERANKO

BY PETER DEPREE AS TOLD BY

STEVE DITKO

NARRATIVE OF BLOOD AND DREAMS

He appeared out of nowhere to rock the comics' universe with a style that synergized ferocity, precision, and illusionism—and, in less than three years, set an unshattered precedent for graphic innovation. An amalgam of visual arabesques, puzzles, and cryptiosms, his work remains as newly original and avant-garde as the day it was created. Yet, heralded as a narrative genius at the height of his fame, he disappeared, mystifying a legion of fans who have since branded him an enigma. Now, he breaks a quarter century of silence to reveal how it happened—and to announce his return to the form!



The practice painting that Leigh Brackett insisted visualized her fantasy hero John Stark; it became the cover to **The Ginger Star** (May 1974). RIGHT: The "colorless" **SHIELD** cover Steranko during his ad agency period.

ANKO

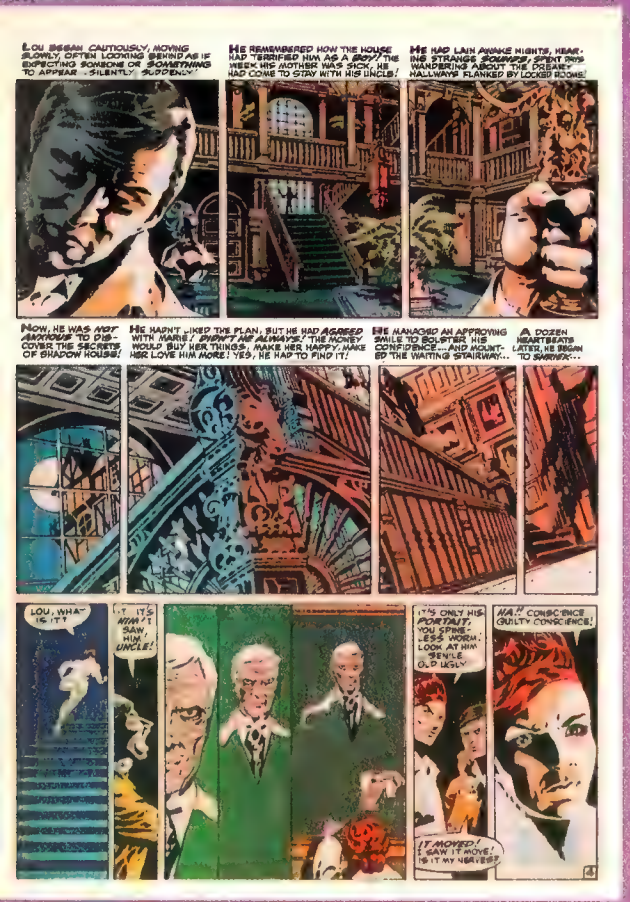
FLASHBACK A HAZE OF BLUE CIGARETTE [illegible] hangs in the fluorescent glare pooling the huge drawing [illegible] the only light in the otherwise gloomy quarters. The tenor sax [illegible] of Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis on the radio cast an even bluer [illegible]ness into the solitude enveloping the room.

A [illegible] out-of-place figure silhouettes against the small prism of [illegible] brightness. In a damp-foam perspiration shirt rolled up at the sleeves, [illegible] slacks, and patent-leather boots, the man pushes over a [illegible]ge of bristol board which has been dissected into a maze of [illegible] panels. There are only three hours until dawn to finish a [illegible] on a new way to tell back-covering tale he has been [illegible] to [illegible]. Think hard.

Steranko began his day in the same room at the agency at ten the previous morning, repeating a routine he has maintained for the past [illegible] years: copywriting and designing ads for everything from annual [illegible] to billboards. He worked straight through until six, rushed back [illegible] his apartment, showered, and changed clothes—and personalities—for [illegible] next venue, an out-of-town location gig where he fronts a rock band [illegible] five hours nightly.

[illegible] after closing time at two, he packed his Fender Stratocaster [illegible] amp into the white MG, completely and raced back to the deserted agency to explore another facet of his persona. For the past [illegible] years, roughly between drudgery and career, he has added a new [illegible] to pop-culture history with his experimental storytelling on **Nick Fury: Agent of SHIELD**, the **X-Men**, and **Captain America**. [illegible] wonder [illegible]ke about him having invented a black pill that eliminates the need for [illegible] they call him the "Ivy League Dracula."

[illegible] is aware that his options at Marvel Comics are narrowing. In the [illegible]-owners, rumblings that [illegible] will be among his [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]


LOU BEGAN CAUTIOUSLY, MOVING SLOWLY, OFTEN LOOKING BEHIND AS IF EXPECTING SOMEONE OR SOMETHING TO APPEAR - SILENTLY! SUDDENLY!
HE REMEMBERED HOW THE HOUSE HAD TERRIFIED HIM AS A BOY! THE WEEK HIS MOTHER WAS SICK, HE HAD COME TO STAY WITH HIS UNCLE!
HE HAD LAIN AWAKE NIGHTS, HEARING STRANGE SOUNDS, SEEING THINGS WANDERING ABOUT THE DREARY HALLWAYS FLANKED BY LOCKED ROOMS!
NOW, HE WAS NOT ANXIOUS TO DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF SHADOW HOUSE!
HE HADN'T LIKED THE PLAN, BUT HE HAD AGREED WITH MARIE! DIDN'T HE ALWAYS? THE MONEY WOULD BUY HER THINGS, MAKE HER HAPPY, MAKE HER LOVE HIM MORE! YES, HE HAD TO FIND IT!
HE MANAGED AN APPROVING SMILE TO BOLSTER HIS CONFIDENCE...AND MOUNTED THE WAITING STAIRWAY...
A DOZEN HEARTBEATS LATER, HE BEGAN TO SCREAM...
LOU, WHAT IS IT?
I... IT'S HIM! I SAW HIM, UNCLE!
IT'S ONLY HIS POKEOUT! YOU SPINELESS WORM! LOOK AT HIM, GENTLE, OLD UGLY
HA!" CONSCIENCE GUILTY CONSCIENCE!
IT MOVED! I SAW IT MOVE! IS IT MY NERVES?

with "scalloped" panels. Typically, Steranko rejected the traditional and sought fresh, iconoclastic solutions. Many of his graphic innovations were so ingenious in their simplicity that readers absorbed them subconsciously. In the **Tower Of Shadows** *story, for example, he inserts two "memory" panels and distinguishes them from real time by eliminating color, thus reducing the substance of their reality.*

He continues the use of a "camera pan" in the tale, unifying his storytelling style. To achieve greater suspense, he compresses the length of a shot's "time" by reducing panel sizes into narrow slivers and creates a kind of rapid-cutting effect that has now become commonplace in film and comics. Sometimes he slices a tier into as many as eight fragments, eight moments of story progression.

The effect is electrifying; the yarn crackles with a tension rarely seen in comics. Steranko continues synergizing one cinematic device with another, always maintaining breathtaking balance. He explores several "zoom" shots, including one symmetrical variation sophisticated enough to raise the hair on readers' necks. Because of its architectonic structure, it reads from both panel sides inward, *instead of across the page from left to right. Steranko enhances the special effect by bleaching all color from the central panel except its most important element: the door, dead center in the panel. Brilliant!*

More innovations come thick and fast, but one in particular should be noted. Irritated by captions requiring six-sided or "notched" panels, Steranko writes each precisely to the width or measure of its accompanying panel–and matches the feat with dialogue balloons (Stan Lee's minor rewrites jogged some of the lines in the published version). The result was a tight, geometric quality that elevated nontitle lettering to the status of a design element. Another first.

After several years in comics, Steranko's understanding of the form–of what could be done and what should not be done on the page–had reached a definitive level. Like Orson Welles had in **Citizen Kane**, *he shattered the old rules and established his own, making a titanic contribution to the art with relatively few strokes, and opening the door for a whole new generation of artists.*

The **Tower of Shadows** flashback sequence. **SHIELD 6**, the Daliesque cover often reproduced as an example in pop-culture books, but probably the period's most atypical comics cover. Magic publicity photo.

SILENCE THE ANNOUNCER DELIVERS A BARRAGE of patter about the performer attempting the dangerous stunt. Fans pack the stadium, all there to watch a double header–and the young man providing the between-game diversion, a self-styled "Liberationist" who has piqued the public's curiosity by scoring a series of newspaper headlines with his impossible escapes from locked jail cells, straitjackets, manacles, and security vaults large enough to hold a Brinks truck.

Stepping back from the five-foot-deep grave they have dug in the field's center, team members listen as the black-clad figure wearing riding pants, boots, and a polo shirt with a white death's head and crossbones silk-screened on the back explains the upcoming feat: that he will be buried–no coffin–and remain alive for 15 minutes *without air!*

The grave has been examined for secret air shafts and the man in black has no concealed devices. He slips a satin hood over his head, and lays down on the dirt bottom. Instantly, team members begin filling the hole, the scoreboard clock flashing the seconds expiring after the daredevil has disappeared under the earth. A few minutes later, the men pound their shovels on the mound to signal the burial is complete

Underground, Steranko experiences a variety of sensations. Instead of cold as one might imagine, he is being pressure-cooked by

own radiated body heat. The darkness is more Stygian than any ossible above ground. A ton of ir presses down so relentlessly hat the slightest movement, even he flexing of a finger or a muscle, impossible. And the silence is bsolute, primally terrifying, eafening. The ultimate claustro- obic nightmare, Houdini out of dgar Allan Poe.

Waiting in the hush above, the udience speculates on what nanner of trick it takes to stay alive or a quarter of an hour without r. There is none. Few, if any, ealize they are witnessing the eal thing: that if anything goes wrong, the human fossil in the rave will suffocate.

Steranko had practiced the ffect previously at a quarry, nder an assistant's watchful eye. Buried beneath a foot of sand, he ould escape when his oxygen nned and monoxide thickened angerously. He had measured is endurance time carefully, but or under performance con- itions or in a deep grave–which would take critical minutes to eopen.

His technique was deceptively mple. Just before burial, he would use a special technique to xpel "used" air from his lungs d inhale fresh oxygen (the ecret of his near-three-minute derwater dives). In the grave, e had folded his arms above his ead, one elbow atop the other, nd placed his forehead tightly gainst the uppermost arm to seal ff the small triangle of pocketed ir. Then, he engaged in a rocess of slow breathing, not nlike a meditative state. The feat emanded strict discipline, which Steranko had practiced for years–a lifesaving buffer against pain, shock, and the deadliest adversary, panic.

Slipping into a state of "suspended animation," his entire body paralyzed and tingling with pins-and-needles numbness,

A gallery of Steranko covers. The cover of George Olshevsky's long out-of-print **Fantastic Four Index** (1979). One of dozens of illustrations and model sheets created for The Insectoids style book in the mid-1980s.

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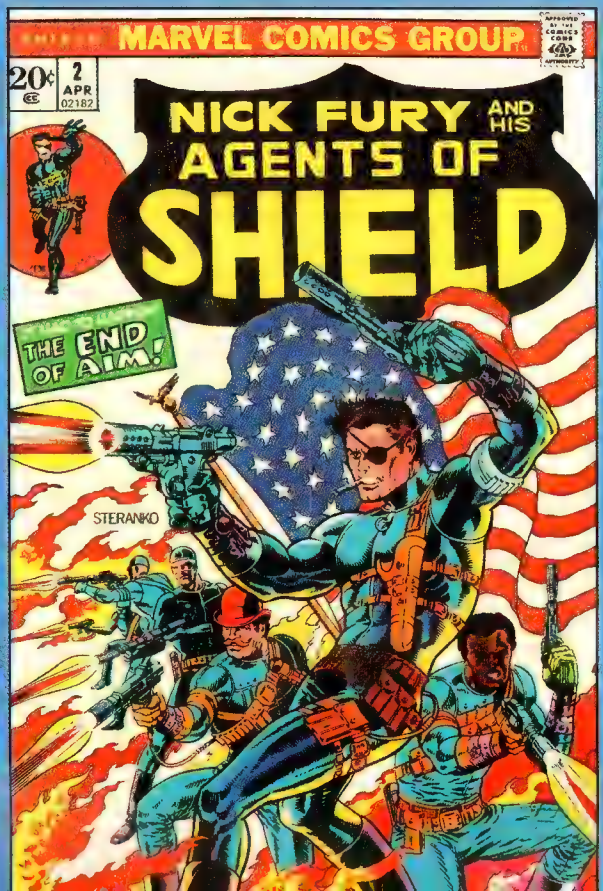


Steranko conjures up a vision of his father. His grandparents had emigrated from the Ukraine–"white" Russia–before WWI and settled in Pennsylvania's coal regions. At ten years old, Steranko's father began working the mines, standing in an underground stream, and separating, by hand, coal from rock and shale. Often he labored 14 hours daily, a task exacerbated by an accident that broke his hip and caused a permanent limp.

He had eight siblings, two of whom were killed in train accidents. During the Depression, the brothers, jobless and broke, went into business for themselves, illegally bootlegging blue-black ore out of the earth. Locating a deserted area of company-owned mountain, they would dig a vertical shaft, 20, sometimes 30 feet deep, until they hit a vein of coal. Only one could squeeze into the makeshift hole, and, using a pick, hack out the ore. Buckets were lowered, filled, taken home for fuel, and sometimes sold to neighbors for pennies.

Steranko recalls his father's stories of being the "man in the hole," of the cold, unsupported earth collapsing in upon itself, of being buried alive, until his brothers could dig him out. Wryly, he thought about his situation becoming a family tradition.

The scoreboard clock registers that a quarter of an hour has elapsed, and a half a dozen shovels bite furiously into the grave to free its occupant.

inside. Having used up all the oxygen in the tiny pocket, Steranko is drenched in "pre-death" perspiration. He senses the shovels chopping toward him, hoping that they will free him before he suffocates.

NICK FURY HAD BEEN PROMOTED. Instead of sharing **Strange Tales** *with Doc Strange, he had become popular enough to inhabit his own book.*

Steranko felt the pressure of the promotion, too, and resolved to increase his efforts–and page count–to make the **SHIELD** *series Marvel's most innovative title. His rough for the first-issue cover, however, was rejected by Stan Lee, a bad omen. (It appeared somewhat redesigned as the cover to issue 5.)*

A hyperkinetic pace was set right from the opening sequence: three pages of the superspy penetrating a monolithic fortress–in silence, a milestone in storytelling history. Without captions or balloons, Steranko created an intense, suspenseful narrative using an arsenal of advanced narrative techniques that were light years ahead of most others.

After establishing the setting and atmosphere on an intriguing splash page, he recounted the remainder of the action in two facing pages divided into 16 equal panels, giving each the same dramatic weight and temporal substance. Although the sequence is told with great purity and clarity, its abstract concepts, camera angles, and complex movement of characters depend heavily on readers' cognitive powers, probably more than any comics page published to that time–and possibly since.

Steranko manipulated readers like Hitchcock (one of his prime inspirations alongside Welles, Siodmak, Ford and Curtiz), making them accept one premise, snapping it about-face, then, just when they think they'd figured it out, dropping another corkscrew twist into the action.

Stan responded negatively to the silent tour de force, suggesting that retailers would believe that the book was misprinted if there were no word balloons on the first three pages–and would send the books back. Another of their legendary conflicts ensued over the unusual concept, with Stan deciding to risk the chance that it might work.

Production manager Sol Brodsky refused, however, to pay Steranko for scripting the pages, arguing that he could only pay for words–and none were on the opening pages. There is no confirmation about how Steranko won the disagreement, but some bullpen staffers rumored it may have had something to do with being thrown from a 10th-floor window.

The book and the concept were apparently a roaring success. Other writers and artists imitated the silent sequence in their own books, often bastardizing the idea beyond credibility. Gary Friedrich used it for a one-page sequence in **Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos**. *In a battle scene with tanks and planes, bazooka shells and bombs exploding everywhere, the writer eliminated* all *copy–captions, dialogue balloons, sound effects–so the conflagration appeared to occur in utter silence. Howling was right!*

SHIELD *elicited a high volume of mail, including one response from a young fan telling Jim and Stan what a great job they had done and "PS: you forgot the words on the first three pages." It was signed, "Your friend, Butchie Haskell, Age 11." Stan was right after all. Steranko still has the letter as a token of humility.*

SPECTACLE MORE THAN A THOUSAND spectators have swarmed the midway to witness the stunt.

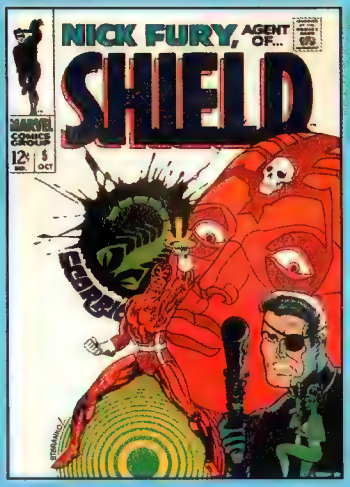
Two huge arc lamps have been positioned nearby, their blinding beams crisscrossing the structure that towers between them. At its base, a committee watches as a young, dark-haired performer strips off his black jacket and tie, explaining over a portable public-address system that he has accepted the amusement park's challenge: tonight he will free himself in full view after being bound to a *moving* Ferris wheel.

At every night's show, Steranko has undertaken a new challenge from an audience anxious to collect the $1000 he offers to place him in a restraining device from which he cannot escape. Yesterday, a local fur rancher locked him in a pair of rusty manacles that had a key broken off in the lock. The previous night, a postal official crammed him into a government mail bag. Earlier, a state policeman wrapped him so forcefully in a straitjacket that one of the straps ripped off. None collected the bounty.

Throughout the day, announcements touted the event, and as twilight shrouds the area, the test is about to begin. The gigantic neon-decked wheel is stopped, and the escape artist spreads his arms so that they can be lashed to a horizontal support between the twin rims. One hundred feet of rope is tightly wound and knotted around his body, back and forth to structural supports, binding him like a moth trapped in a spider web–and the wheel is set in motion.

The mechanical monolith lurches, carrying its captive to the height of a revolution, then beyond, where the figure begins an upside-down descent. The position is no problem. Steranko trained in school as a gymnast–his specialties, parallel bars and flying rings.

For two years, he has parlayed the mystery of escapes into a career that defied a gauntlet of dangerous challenges. He has been



suspended by his heels in straitjackets; locked into handcuffs and leg irons by dozens of lawmen; wound with rope, chains, fishing line, electrical cable, even copper tubing; stuffed into steel cabinets, barrels, vaults, refrigerators, and steamer trunks; bound into restraint collars, pillories, leather yokes, and metal cages; rolled in hurricane fencing; spiked to railroad tracks; nailed into packing cases that were dropped to river bottoms; buried underground; sealed into meat lockers; and entombed into jails and prison cells. In most cases, he escaped in *less* time that it required to imprison him.

Often, he had no time or opportunity to practice the stunts, especially in challenge situations. The Ferris wheel qualifies as one of those situations.

It turns one full circle, then two. The figure sways inside the network of rope, using strength, muscle coordination, and controlled agility to untie one knot after another. Soon, loose ends flail in the air around him, and the audience realizes that one miscalculation could send him plummeting into space–or into the crushing gears below.

At the top of the third revolution, too many critical knots are undone. Suddenly, coils of rope let go, their slack no longer supporting their captive's weight. He pitches backward like a rock, head first, cords trailing after him, still tangled in his body. The crowd shrieks.

Instinctively, Steranko begins to right himself in the spin, as though in a flying dismount. There is, however, no support beam or cable in his path to be caught. He hurtles downward about 16 feet, before crashing into a passing seat that was not there a split-second earlier.

Before the wheel is stopped, he manages to stand up and

wave to the audience, signifying that he has survived the stunt. Applause thunders in response; they had come to see a man defy death, and experienced the thrill of the unexpected.

Steranko has sprained both wrists, sustained multiple bruises and a cut under his left eyebrow. A half hour later, he is performing on stage, issuing another challenge, daring the throng to outwit him, to find a restraint from which he cannot escape.

"I have the ability to release myself from any form of confinement. No lock can resist me. If I were a criminal, no jail could hold me. Tonight, I'll prove that no handcuff or imprisoning device on the face of the earth can restrain me. If you doubt it, I invite you to step on stage and witness the impossible at close range."

Management later requests him to perform the Ferris wheel stunt *again* the next day. Steranko replies that he does not feel obligated to offer more than one of his nine lives per engagement.

WHEN STERANKO ASSUMED THE ASSIGNMENT, THE NICK FURY SHIELD adventures being dossiered in the pages of **Strange Tales** *undeniably lacked a hot-button quality. A 007 rip-off, the series had, for the previous year, bounced around the bullpen walls like an 8-ball in a bad cushion shot.*

To jump-start the precocious newcomer, Stan Lee asked Jack Kirby to lay out three issues which would require finishing the pencils and inking. A lifelong Kirby fan, Steranko was honored to collaborate with Marvel's artistic architect, and felt he could easily find his idol's groove. He rendered the King's action cover and bore into the interiors, yet, instead of becoming another Marvel doppelganger, he experienced immediate and increasing difficulty in relating to Kirby's storytelling.

Blaming his own inexperience, Steranko was unable to realize or accept that Kirby's approach and his were diametrically opposed. His subsequent analysis revealed the reason why: Kirby's storytelling focused on the explosion, the highest moment of a scene–and that he dramatized the moment just before *eruption! It was the difference between shell shock and surgical strike, between paroxysm and suspense, between watching the fuse burn and the dynamite blow.*

*Steranko began developing his storytelling sensibilities with his initial solo effort (***Strange Tales** *154), and he delivered a primitive, yet potent, vision of things to come. From the splash, he started reshaping the strip into the technomyth of his vision with a floor-level shot (very un-Kirbyish) bristling with more machinery (and underscored on the second page with an actual blueprint of the Heli-Carrier) that had ever been seen on the comics' page–all designed in a style that was neither Kirby, Wood, nor Infantino, but intriguingly original. Readers sensed that lightning was about to strike!*

In rapid order, Fury was clean-shaven and dressed to kill (Steranko unabashedly parodied the 007/Q sequence in every Bond thriller from a subjective, tongue-in-cheek viewpoint). By page four, he was exploring visual metaphors, matching imagery, electronic panel borders, dynamic symmetry–and sustained suspense.

On page five, he delivered a shocker with nuclear force, revealing that the previous downbeat packing was no accident. When the requisite Marvel brawl unfolds, Steranko interrupts it with another floor-level progressive sequence, more machinery, and the first of many innovative special visual FX. Although the drawing was crude, the dynamics were pure fireworks!

With each successive issue, Steranko's narrative experiments became

ADVOCATUS DIABOLI

Stan Lee

ARCHITECT OF THE MARVEL AGE—'NUFF SAID!

When I first met Jim, and saw his work, I was incredibly impressed. And when his artwork and his stories appeared in Marvel Comics, it was like he burst on the scene like a skyrocket! He was immediately the center of attention of artists and writers and the fans alike. I mean it was amazing because Jim brought a new style and a new excitement to comics. There are certain people in art whose talent makes them very unique and memorable. Jim is one of those people.

Neal Adams

RENOWNED FOUNDER OF CONTINUITY COMICS

Once upon a time in the comic book industry, everybody went away.They stayed away for ten years. And when it was time to come back, nobody was ready because the industry was half-destroyed. What was required was for new people with new ideas, new things to say and new ways to say them, to come in. And luckily, new people came in and invigorated the industry. One of those people was Jim Steranko. He brought a new look, new concepts.new directions, and something new to say. Just when the comics needed new voices, Jim was there with a new voice. And then, the comic-book industry grew up.

Joe Sinnott

HEAVYWEIGHT MARVEL ARTIST-INKER

Comparatively speaking, Jim Steranko created few comic pages, but they spoke vol-

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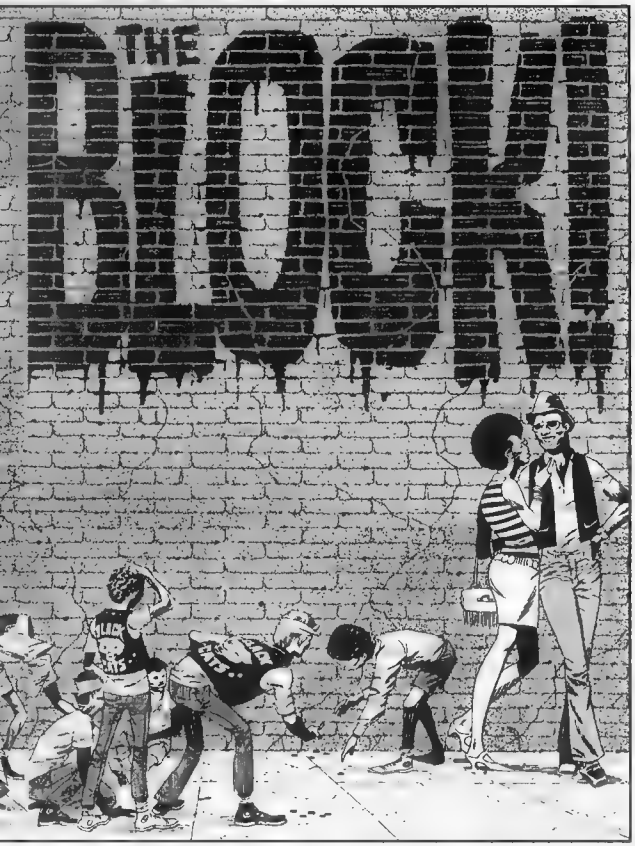

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The splash for Steranko's anti-drug tale **The Block.** Thousands of copies of the comic were distributed free to numerous inner-city schools throughout the East Coast. The artist in his motorcycle years. RIGHT: A publicity portrait used to promote a Steranko magic book.

more daring, and ranged from spectacular failures to outrageous successes. He took the comics world by storm, and was just as unpredictable. Before his tour, comics were as sexy as a fireplug; Steranko infused his tales with psycho-erotic tension, not just suggesting the provocative sensuality of his black leather-clad characters, but hinting at their depravity–and was promptly censored by the Comics Code. (Madame Hydra's whip, for example, became a rope lasso!)

To hit his stride, he assumed the tasks of writer, penciller, inker, and colorist (**Strange Tales** 155)*, setting a precedent at Marvel that may still be unmatched. The climax of his Hydra Island series was packed with more spine-snapping surprises than Quentin Tarantino could shoehorn into a dozen* **Pulp Fictions***. But it was during his nine-part Yellow Claw serial that Steranko began consciously polishing his approach, transforming raw, rough-edged concepts into fully realized dramatics with subtle and even sophisticated touches. His ability to articulate the abstract–such as time–proved that Steranko was much more than a scrupulous imitator and made SHIELD the coolest strip in the Imperious-Rex lineup.*

Studded with wild cliffhangers, bizarre characters, fantastic props, and sudden-death surprises, the serial (**Strange Tales** 159-167)*–specifically its storytelling–nailed readers to the backs of their chairs. No, it was not as orchestrated as Toth, charming as Eisner, stylized as Kurtzman, gritty as Kubert, nor as animated as Kirby. But what it did encompass set the high-water mark for pop Zeitgeist in its own period.*

Steranko's full-throttle approach layered innovation on innovation with maze and puzzle panels, psychedelic FX, hidden messages, subliminal suggestions, strobed movement, optical illusions, page turnarounds, and bloodthirsty action, action, action! *His continual analysis of the form triggered a relentless barrage of feverishly-paced experimentation, destroying rules and clichés as it drove the perimeter of comic art into uncharted territory. (Without his first-strike groundwork, there might be no foundation for such New Wavers as Sienkewicz, Giffen, or Bisley.)*

He learned early what many superhero craftsmen were either too blind to realize or too lazy to achieve–that it costs no more on the comic page to erect a million-dollar set than a ten-dollar set. Steranko knew he could compete with any mega-budget flick by creating bank-breaking spectaculars on every page. He allowed his architectural sensibility to run rampant and visualized a myriad of technoscapes that left readers gasping.

The concept also provided the clue to devising a satisfying climax to the Yellow Claw serial, the quintessential ending (**Death of Superman** *pay attention!*) *to a nine-month roller coaster ride, the ultimate spectacular, a four-page spread that required* two comic books placed side by side *to see it in its entirety!*

Although he had conceived the idea in the seventh installment, the next issue lacked two double pages in its pagination. So, he wrote an additional chapter to the saga–and delivered one of comics' most powerful graphic knockouts.

Another chapter in the Steranko canon had closed.

BLOOD NEW YEAR'S EVE.

Four hours into 1956, and the main drag is almost deserted except for a few cars and a black leather-jacketed figure who crosses the empty street in a homeward-bound direction against a bitter wind heralding the promise of snow.

The walker is deep in concentration, wondering how he can support himself when he quits his job at a local bookbindery. He knows little about commercial art; maybe he can survive on the kind of quick-buck schemes that have provided pocket money in the past few years. Unexpectedly, from the darkened lobby of a men's clothing store, a voice stops him. "Hey, man; you lookin' for something?"

The figure pauses, trying to recognize the voice–and fails. "You looking for trouble?", it echoes again against the glass and marble corridor. "Or are you...chicken!", the man taunts, emerging slightly from the shadows. "Maybe *too chicken* to play this game, huh?"

The man reaches into his jacket, pulls a knife. "No jabbing, you understand, just a little...sticking!" It is suddenly apparent that the man is attempting to recreate the fight scene from last year's JD hit **Rebel Without A Cause**. He tosses the small penknife at the walker, who takes a step backward and wards off the weapon with a flick of his arm. It clatters to the sidewalk. "Pick it up, *chicken,*" the man challenges, drawing a second knife, a switchblade that snaps open to a gleaming thirteen inches.

Stay or run? The walker opts for the former–making a serious change in the knifer's scenario. Instead of picking up the weapon, he kicks it into the street and produces his own, an ebony-handled stiletto that matches that of his antagonist.

The man is jolted; his advantage gone. The leather-jacketed figure steps in tight, almost face to face, and waits for the man to either back down or make his move. Both hold their breaths for a beat, then the man makes an underhanded thrust, driving his knife into the figure's left side,

James: His great [illegible] telling was of my favorites, second only to the monster Jack Kirby. Jim will always be one of my favorite people. He was the first [illegible] who publicly stated that [illegible] even better than it was.

Bernie Wrightson

ARTISTIC ÉCLAT OF THE HORROR FANTASY GENRE

Jim is great, I've always liked him a lot. I thought his '60s period was very refreshing. I remember at the time thinking that until Jim came along, I hadn't even realized how stale comics had gotten. I thought, 'Well maybe I'm just getting jaded.' And then here comes Jim! With this extremely innovative storytelling and drawing. And it hit me then, just how *formularized* comics had become, particularly the Marvel books. Jim just came [illegible] and shook everything up–and was immediately imitated by a lot of people with not nearly as much talent. They almost made a parody out of what he started.

Erik Larsen

CREATOR OF THE SAVAGE DRAGON

I think there are a lot of [illegible] it–they got it from *somebody else* who got it from Jim. He's one of those guys who's always expanding the medium and the visual vocabulary of comic art. I dig it the most!

Joe Kubert

FOUNDER OF THE KUBERT SCHOOL OF CARTOONING AND GRAPHIC ART

Jim's been over to the house many times and I've

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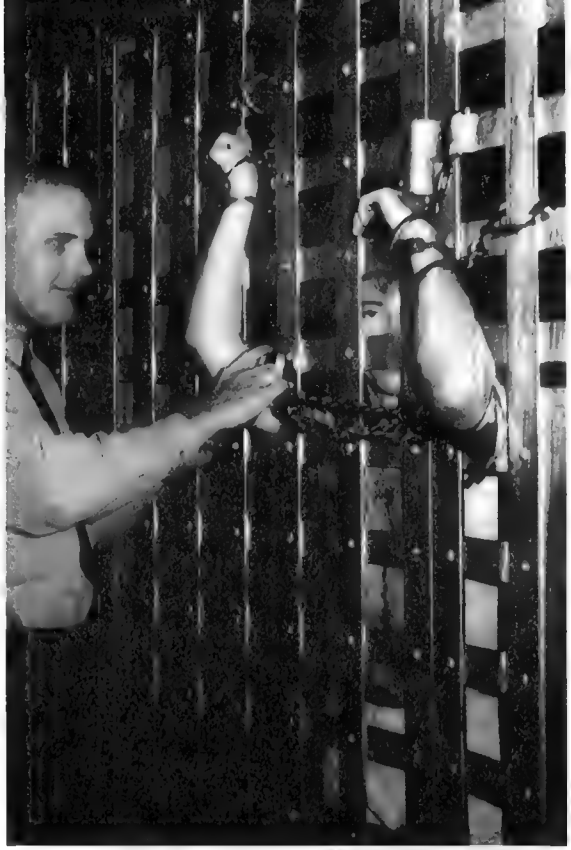

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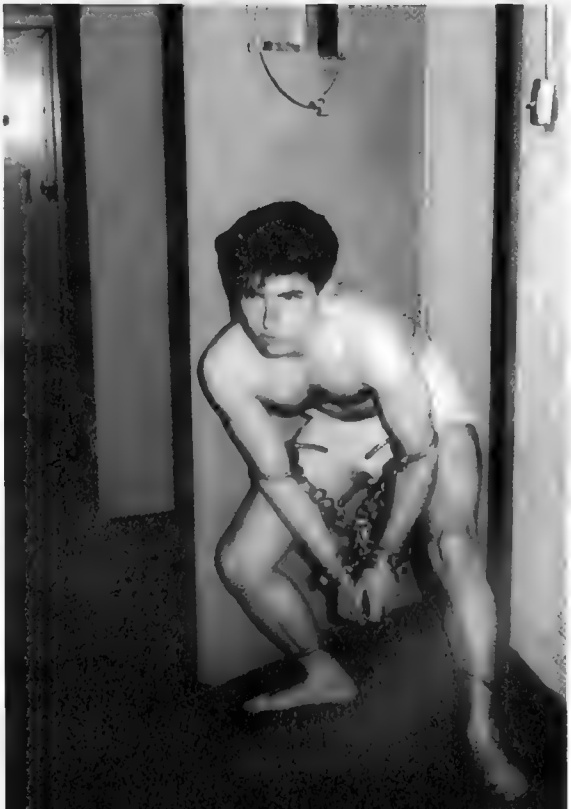


beneath the edge of the leather jacket, just above the hipbone. In response, the figure lashes out left-to-right, slicing horizontally across the man's forehead, a long, razor-thin line that instantly turns his face into a *crimson mask.*

The fight is over. Blinded by his own blood, the man retreats into the lobby. The figure moves back onto the street. The discipline evolved during his escape work takes over: no panic, no pain. He continues walking in the same direction.

After a while, the journey takes a grotesque comic twist. Each step produces an odd, squelching sound as his left boot begins filling with blood. Community General Hospital is only three blocks away. Steranko begins walking toward it.

THERE IS POWER IN COMICS. Their ability to influence and inspire readers–especially young readers–is tragically underrated by educators. As one of its prime exponents, Steranko realized that

Four Steranko prison escapes. Note the extra handcuffs and leg irons used by police officials to restrain him during each challenge jailbreak. LOWER LEFT: Steranko is literally hanging by his wrists from manacles locked to the overhead bars. TWO LARGE IMAGES: Houdini outdone–the outside door locks cannot be reached from inside the cells. Steranko's escape stunts inspired his friend and mentor Jack Kirby to create a character based on his exploits–Mister Miracle–the only comic superhero to be predicated on a living performer. RIGHT: Steranko and his 52 assistants.

he was reaching an impressionable market on a worldwide basis, and began tailoring his approach to accommodate it.

He constructed his stories–especially the SHIELD series–on three levels. The first was purely visual, created for kids not yet able or willing to read; the basic story, he decided, must be drawn so that even the youngest or most illiterate could assimilate and enjoy it.

The second level was written for Marvel's traditional eight-to-fourteen-year-old readers, who required straight-up, dead-center action. The third addressed an older, more educated audience who accepted the strip's parody–and occasional satire–by laughing with, not at, the outrageous machinations of Fury and company.

The unique concept (one that Steranko deigned to mention until years afterward to protect the innocent) was handled with the dexterity of a juggler with an apple, an Indian club, and an ax! Yet in terms of the power he wielded, he felt unfulfilled, as though he was cheating himself–in addition to those touched by his work.

In 1971, he found a balance. With journeyman publisher Byron Preiss, Steranko volunteered his services as writer, penciller and inker to create a mini-comic aimed at grade-school students. The story unfolded in an inner city hood, focusing on two young friends whose paths take them in conflicting directions. Titled **The Block***–and predicated on drama, not bloodshed–it was a classic morality play with a potent anti-drug message.*

The prototype, given away free to schools in metropolitan areas, became an instant critical hit, winning approval from black university students and elementary school teachers alike. More importantly, kids reacted to it positively. The University of Pennsylvania funded its first major printing, with Philadelphia's Model Cities Program distributing.

Tabloids featuring **The Block** *swamped urban classrooms. Low-graders colored its B&W panels while teachers told them the tale of the two "brothers" and transcended racial lines exactly as Steranko had hoped. At one high school, students turned the parable into a rock opera!*

Calling it "highly professional," **Sesame Street***'s Joan Ganz Cooney led the chain reaction of national recognition that followed. Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton deemed it "impressive." Community Committee on Drug Abuse director Bill Campbell responded enthusiastically with "***The Block** *did bring the point across…in today's lifestyle." William Cray of the Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association cited the project as a "splendid effort." Phoenix House rated it "realistic." Atlanta's George Puckett confirmed that "Steranko's work…suits the need perfectly!" Even the Rev. Jesse Jackson gave it his stamp of approval.*

As the demand for **The Block** *grew, Preiss wrote a Teacher's Guide, which was included in the comic's distribution plan. Although the effort was embraced by a multitude of education and community leaders, and subtly shaped consciousness of the children who read it,* **The Block's** *greater contribution was in paving the way for a new kind of communication in the classroom, one that spoke directly to the kids in their own medium.*

The blood, sweat, and tears that Steranko had invested in his survival had come full circle–and provided a valedictory sense of closure.

RISK HOW LONG AGO THE FACTORY HAD BURNED out none of the kids knew. But as a playground, it had served as Camelot, where the lances of jousting knights rang against the walls; as Wyoming cliffs where Hopalong Cassidy and Bar 20 riders were always considered him a very dear friend, someone that I've always had a hell of a lot of respect for. He's also been to the school as a guest. Jim used to do magic with cards and coins for Adam and Andy and all of us when he'd come over to the house. Jim knew them 25 years ago.

Steranko was one of the earliest guys to self-publish, to go out on a limb, really, and start his own magazine. And this was despite the fact that he was always as busy as hell; he always had as much work as he wanted and more. But still he wanted to do it his way (laughter)!

His style of illustration has always been extremely clever. What stands out in my mind as far as Jim's stuff is concerned is clarity in terms of storytelling and dramatization, which I've always felt was the most important factor for anybody who wants to be a cartoonist. Communication is what it's all about. And Jim has always been very, very strong in those areas.

David Copperfield

WORLD'S GREATEST ILLUSIONIST

Steranko is an enigmatic character in the world of magic. A rebel, a legend who created a series of escape ideas and showed the world of magic that the art of escapes has no "creative" bounds.

Max Allan Collins

COMIC SCRIBE. NOVELIST. WRITER-DIRECTOR "MOMMY"

Jim and I have several thematic interests. His **History of Comics** was the best I ever read on the subject. He's one of the

STERANKO

ambushed by renegade outlaws; as a tower city in Mongo where Flash Gordon sizzled in Ming's insidious death ray.

The building was a fortress that challenged the imagination, the endurance, and sometimes even the courage of those who explored its charred mysteries. Like many of the neighborhood kids, Steranko was fascinated by the labyrinth of pipes and electrical cables, ancient fuse boxes and blackened hallways. No one with any moxie paid heed to the posted signs warning "NO TRESPASSING! VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED!"

Built against a hillside, it rose two-and-a-half stories in front. The roof was gone; only the walls remained. It was a crumbling checkerboard maze to anyone looking down from the hilltop–which the kids frequently did, wondering if they could prove themselves like the older guys had boasted in street-corner chatter.

Occasionally they would stroll down the hill and "walk the wall" until just before the angle was too high to safely leap off. Not many went all the way to the structure's front edge. The act was a coming-of-age ritual with the neighborhood gang's twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, about half of whom dared the test. Some went the limit; a few even walked the building's perimeter. Many jumped down half way along. Several fell. No one was ever killed.

Steranko's turn had come and he decided to cross the wall as no one had ever done it before–on a bicycle! The red-and-white Schwinn (a customer gave the bike to his father for some appliance repair work) was a constant companion, the source of a multitude of scrapes, cuts, and scars accumulated while doing things that bicycles were never meant to do.

Amid a salvo of wisecracks about ambulances and transfusions–meant to bolster courage rather than erode it–he targets the south wall. The ten-inch-wide cinder blocks seem in better shape than the opposite wall. Steranko and those who have turned out to witness the crossing realize that, unlike walking, where one can stop to maintain balance and composure, the bike ride will allow no stops, no area to rest a foot if something goes wrong. No outs. No precautions.

It's one pass with *no* alternatives–except falling off the wall, inside or out.

Steranko lines up the bike about five feet uphill for a start not too slow, but not too fast. Then, he pushes forward. The bike rolls onto the wall, bumpy but steady, its driver concentrating only on the thin path stretching out 70 interminable feet in the distance.

The wisecracks dwindle as the rider traverses the span, seeming from below to move so slowly against the bright summer sky that he appears like a silhouette defying gravity. Risks are nothing new for

ALL CHANDLER IMAGES © 1995 JAMES STERANKO ARR

Steranko's hard-boiled private eye, Chandler. The artist attempted to capture the cinematic realism of the vintage RKO and Warner's noir thrillers by eliminating cartooning techniques, such as feathering and holding lines. Additionally, through his extensive knowledge of reproduction, he was able to create the hard-and soft-edged look of the "Chandler style" entirely in pencil, without inking, another innovation. The images on this page are from comics' first dramatic graphic novel, Red Tide. LEFT: **A promotional poster created for the Winnipeg Museum and Art Gallery–and reproduced here slightly larger than the original art. (Posters are available in limited supply from Supergraphics.)**

handful of people over the last 20 years who's actually done private-eye comic books. His **Chandler** is a terrific example of the starkly dramatic drawing style that he developed and perfected. Now, lots of artists do moody, shadowy work, but there's a blobby look to it. Jim's art captures the essence of hardboiled so perfectly that a Steranko image looks like *water would bead off it!* He's perfect for a comic-book noir, because of his heightened use of lighting and shadows. Very sharply defined, moody drawings. Prior to **Chandler**, his comics were extremely cinematic, without that misunderstanding which a lot of artists and writers have of false similarities between movies and comics–they are *different* mediums. But the common factors and the use of smaller panels to convey movement and to play with time was something he did in a very sophisticated way. He also had a great design sense. Few people following him have had the solid underpinnings of traditional storytelling that allowed that design sense and cinematic storytelling to be so effective. In subsequent years, many artists copied the superficialities of Steranko's work, without understanding his storytelling. A lot of modern comic-book artists could benefit from a careful study thereof.

Ray Bradbury

PREMIER AMERICAN NOVELIST AND POET

Steranko and I guested together at several conventions more than two

kids who have spent much of their dreary existence trying to enliven it. They've learned that risks generate adrenaline and punch up self-esteem, even when the price is torn flesh and shattered bone.

From the age of seven, Steranko and friends had dared each other to leap across the nearby railroad tracks, just in front of moving trains–to see how *close* they could get as the engine roared by. Playing the game after dark was even more hazardous, judging when to jump and how to land. Sometimes, they could feel the heat from the steam and hot cinders raining down from the smokestack.

Hoping their parents would not find out, the kids often played in the woods, armoring themselves with tire chains and enacting battles with loaded BB guns to emulate their movie heroes. His worst wound: an arrow that almost claimed his eye. Another day, another risk.

The watchers hold their breaths as Steranko reaches the half-way point, where the wall is almost two stories high. The bike rolls steadily forward, now at the three-quarter mark. Ten feet. Five. The corner. Steranko brakes at the building's front edge, balancing with his right foot on the right-angle structure. He dismounts carefully, slowly turning the clumsy bike in the opposite direction and repeating the stunt. At the return's half-way point, he pedals faster, picking up speed as the height of the wall diminishes. A few seconds later, he's on solid ground. The wisecracks begin again. "Nuts! Looks like we're not gonna see any blood today!"

"Oh yeah? The day's not over yet!"

FLAYED BY A BRUTAL JANUARY MORNING WIND, STERANKO AND Byron Preiss, a young publisher with a fascination for the four-color form, had ducked into a diner at 76th and Madison for breakfast. They had spent most of the night talking about the future of comics.

"Why not do something you always wanted to do, but could never do at Marvel?"

One of Steranko's secret goals was to tell a story in every genre and sub genre, from submarine snorkelers to African mosquito operas. He suggested a Western. Preiss riposted that Westerns were currently off-season.

"How about a hardboiled detective tale? They're never out of style," the artist said, slipping into a scuffed naugahyde booth. The '30s diner, with its chrome-trimmed, mirror-black Formica tabletops, deco lights, and checkerboard tiles sparked an idea.

" That's it! Let's do it as a graphic novel for my Fiction Illustrated line!" The "new, adult" form, just emerging in the mid-'70's, was being touted as the Holy Grail of Comics by creators and publishers alike. None, however, had the vision or nerve to produce material other than SF or superheroes, and, in playing it safe, generated little more than overpriced comics–the same overground retreads, but on enamel paper.

Sure, somebody would do it some *day. The breakfasters looked at each other with the same thought. Maybe today. Maybe us!*

"OK, what'll be about? Who's in it? What'll you call it?"

"It's got to have a title synonymous with the detective genre. Maybe it should be called **Spillane!**"

"That would be asking for trouble."

"So? That's my middle name!"

"Seriously, how about a title?"

"Seriously, I'll call it **Chandler!**"

An hour later, the two friends were at Pyramid books. Executive Norman Goldfind knew Steranko's comic work and liked the idea of underwriting a pioneering format. "Let's hear about it. Who's in it and what's it about?"

Steranko knew the question was

decades ago. Years later, he illustrated my story "The Foghorn" [the inspiration for the classic thriller **The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms**] in an anthology–and it was gorgeous. Steranko is A-1 with me.

Richard Corben
MEGASTAR MASTER OF ADVENTURE FANTASY
Steranko had an influence on my storytelling. I found the opening silent scene of **SHIELD** 1 particularly impressive. He was an excellent draftsman, of course, but what impressed me the most was his storytelling.

coming and answered with a list of images he knew intimately from old RKO and Warner thrillers: rain-slick streets, black limousines, blondes in tight dresses, tommyguns, nightclubs, and top-coated figures brandishing .45s. "OK, OK, but what's it called?"

Steranko told him, referring to the dean of hardboiled authors, the creator of Philip Marlowe. On the strength of that name, Goldfind decided to take the big risk. He cut a check, a $10,000 advance, against the one-word title.

By the time winter changed to spring, Steranko had completed writing and illustrating the 120-page novel, a ground breaker considered important enough to get a positive review in the **New York Times**. *He had returned to the form after a five-year absence and delivered another first, an adult graphic novel told in an adult style–plus a host of innovations that shattered more old rules and charted new ones.*

DREAMS IT WAS MOST DANGEROUS IN WET weather, but wind was no ally either. The trick was to take it slow, easy, inching along the drainpipe that angled shallowly up the stark side of the building.

The Embassy Theater was the city's largest, rising to a three-story height, a classic movie palace with a towering neon deco facade. It was also the easiest to break into if you didn't have the price of a ticket (Steranko and friends easily qualified)–and if you knew how.

Steranko applied his youthful imagination to the problem and found numerous solutions. If the theater was full, he would simply pry open one of the emergency doors when a film was over, slip through, and mingle with the exiting crowd–except, instead of leaving, he would take a seat as far away as possible. The latter was necessary because opening the door would set off an alarm causing a squad of ushers to race to the exit and collar any intruders.

But there were other ways that depended less on timing and crowded aisles. The roof was sure-fire at any time; the problem was getting there. That's where the drainpipe came in. Approximately six inches in diameter, it was anchored to the flat, barren expanse of the east wall where it angled *upward* from the building's back corner to the front roof edge, a span of about 35 yards. In fall and winter, 35 treacherous yards.

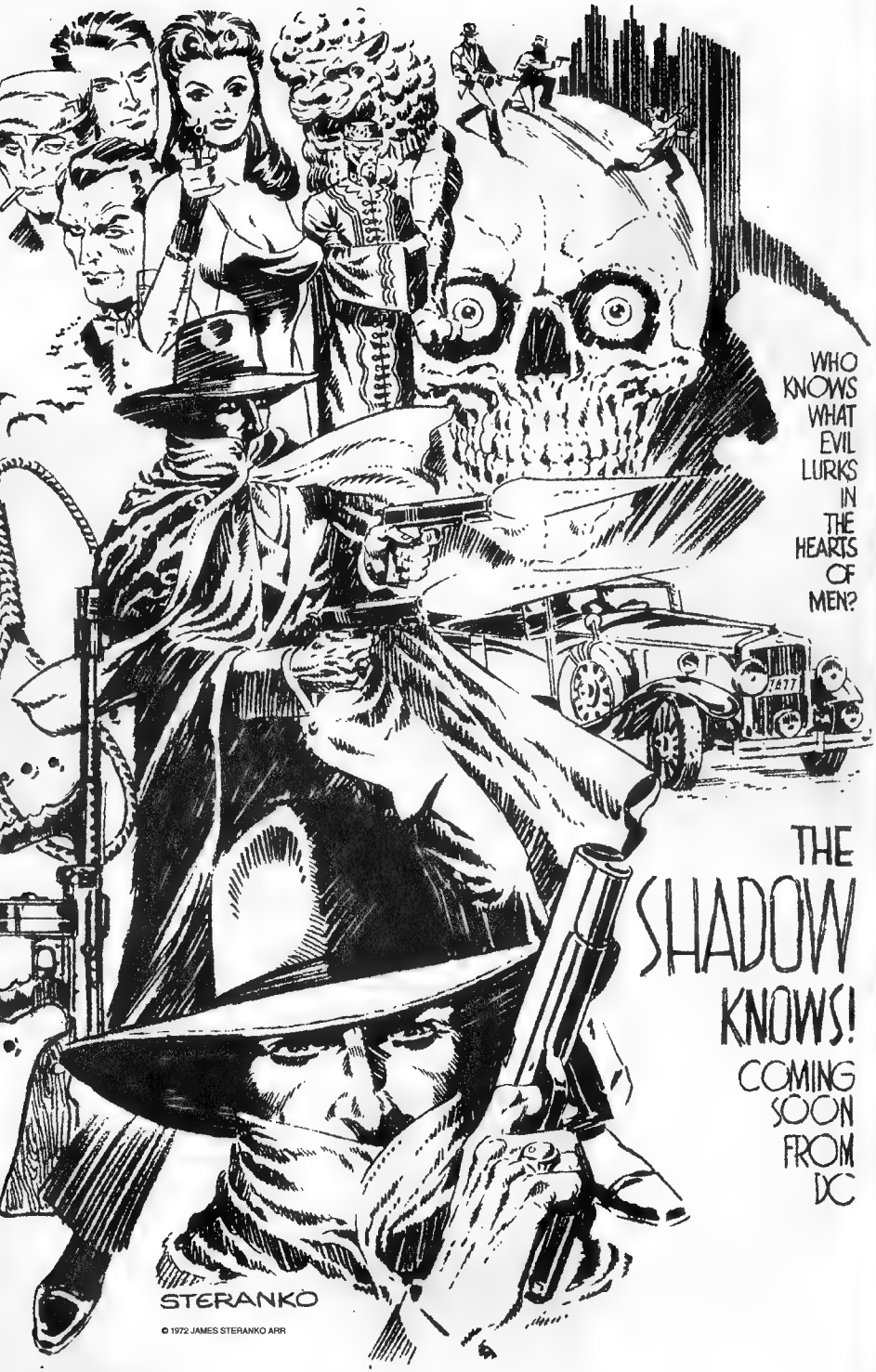
To gain access to the pipe, Steranko first climbed to a one-story overhang roof, then "strolled the pipe" by bracing heels and shoulders against the wall and walking sideways up the incline–with the soles of his feet projecting over the edge of the round pipe. He maintained a tenuous balance by pressing the back of his head against the wall; any variation would throw him forward into the narrow concrete alley between buildings, a two-and-a-half story drop.

Even without looking down–not recommended–it was a wet-palm situation after the half-way point. At night, pigeons perched on the pipe, increasing the hazard. The most difficult maneuver, however, occurred where the pipe connected with the downspout. At that point, he was forced to shift position and face the wall, a process achieved by crossing one leg over another while gripping the downspout with a backhanded grip and turning around.

A short climb up the down spout and Steranko was safe–momentarily. Twenty feet away, in the roof's center, was a square cover, a tarpaper-layered lid that could be pried up for access to the room below. The problem was a twelve-foot drop to the floor–into a pitch-black room. Landing on the edge of a table or even a chair would almost guarantee a broken leg or worse, a scary proposition.

The devil's luck persisted. Aside from a few scrapes and

Comics' first authentic silent sequence, from **SHIELD** 1. One of Steranko's most sophisticated graphic passages, a tour de force of narrative orchestration and experimentation with the cognitive process. The two flanking pages represent additional innovations with panel configurations and kinetic layout.



Gary Gianni
CURRENT SHADOW COMICS ARTIST

Along with two friends, I met Jim in 1974. We were art students, and he was encouraging. His interest in us made me feel as if we were the most important people in the room—not an easy feat, considering his popularity at a crowded comic convention. Twenty years passed and when I began drawing comics, I realized the impression he had made, his discussion on storytelling techniques, character development and so on.

Recently, I began drawing The Shadow and I reread an article Steranko had written on his approach to the character. His conclusion was so Frank Capra-like. The cry of the fan/art student swelled up in me shouting, "Yeah! Gary, give it everything you've got!"

Steranko's words bear repeating: "And, if you, like me, happen to be an artist, there's a possibility that sometime in the future you'll be hard at work turning out a series of Shadow paintings. Anything can happen. Who knows?"

P. Craig Russell
AWARD-WINNING ARTIST-WRITER

I first saw Steranko's work when I was starting to recognize and appreciate artists' styles. I can still see those SHIELD pages in my mind's eye. It was an event. There was Wood and Kirby, Krigstein, and Eisner in his work, but it was apparent, even to a 14-year-old, that *something else* was there too. Years later, I realized that Steranko, like Wood, Raymond, Foster, Davis, Ingels, Wrightson, Frazetta,

bruises, neither Steranko nor his pals were ever seriously hurt. They would cautiously make their way from the room into an adjacent hall, then to the balcony, to watch another Hollywood fantasy play out.

Films were especially important to Steranko. He had learned to draw from the comics, but his storytelling technique was learned in the darkness of theaters where he studied screen composition, editing, dialogue, set design, character movement, and lighting. It became his school and he often risked his life to take a lesson. Movies had a profound impact on his early development, yet he never dreamed that some years later, he would become part of their history.

BY THE TIME HE WAS IN HIS LATE 20s, STERANKO HAD AMASSED considerable expertise in copywriting, design, production, printing, advertising, promotion, and distribution–and parlayed them, along with his comic experience, into the bestselling **History of Comics** *series, which was among the first to assess and analyze the four-color phenomenon.*

A legion of comic book veterans had complained bitterly about the business and often spoke of publishing their own books, yet none actually made the move until Steranko established Supergraphics in 1969. (He is still the field's only artist to self-publish in the international newsstand arena.)

Fanzines sprouted up prodigiously, most produced by amateurs on duplicating machines, and Steranko felt that the time had come for a professional periodical to surface. He created **Comixscene**, *a high-design tabloid with an experimental twist that was soon retitled* **Mediascene** *to accommodate the full pop-culture range. It was often cited as one of America's freshest publications;* **The Catalogue of Cool** *said, "...it walks the pop cult beat like few other mags."*

Soon it began scoring exclusives–it was the first periodical to cover **Star Wars**, **Close Encounters Of The Third Kind**, *and* **Alien**–*and metamorphosized into slick magazine format as* **Prevue**. *Steranko hit Hollywood like a hurricane, nailing down top celebrity interviews with fierce regularity.*

Harrison Ford, Bo Derek, Steven Speilberg, Sean Connery, Ridley Scott, Debbie Harry, John Huston, Sharon Stone, Roger Moore, Mariel Hemingway, Steven Seagal, Joe Dante, Brooke Shields, Richard Donner, Clint Eastwood, George Lucas, Cynthia Rothrock, Tony Perkins, Oliver Stone, Kathy Ireland, Brandon Lee, David Lynch, Robert Bloch, Christina Applegate, Tim Burton, Chuck Norris, Tanya Roberts, Charlton Heston, Frank Herbert, Sam Raimi, Mark Hamill, Robert Englund, John Milius, Geena Davis, Clive Barker, Sly Stallone, George Miller, Jane Seymour, Arnold Schwarznegger, Francis Ford Coppola, Jamie Lee Curtis, Jean-Claude van Damme, John Landis, Traci Lords, Kurt Russell, Richard Brooks, Grace Jones, Dolph Lundgren, John Carpenter, Michael Douglas, Rhonda Shear, Robin Williams, and scores of others survived his inquisitions.

Some were Steranko fans. Some became friends. Some are collaborators. He added his special touch to such films as **Raiders of the Lost Ark** *and* **Dracula,** *gave less to* **Batman** *and* **Captain America**. *More importantly, he kept his promise to "inform, educate and entertain" his readers with style and integrity. Most film magazines fold within sixteen months; Steranko left a critical imprint on the ribbon of dreams for 25 years.*

SHADOWS IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT what they would do next, the gathering of dark-suited men sharing the huge table in the midtown Manhattan bistro. An aura of electricity surrounded them. Some whispered; others laughed boisterously. It was easy to see that they were all professionals, confident, arrogant, smooth, knowing.

The Witch Doctors.

They would assemble one Thursday a month to swap tales and create miracles in the blink of an eye. Each was an elite in the company of iconoclasts. One only joined by invitation. The requirements: being a published author and unparalleled wizard. There were no bylaws or minutes. All that was necessary was a routine that would baffle the hell out of the others. Almost every object within reach vanished, appeared, or was transformed with astonishing regularity. Magic abounded. Camaraderie was *raison d'être*, but unlike everything else that transpired, it was no illusion.

An unused concept for The Shadow paperback series. LEFT: The presentation page Steranko created for DC Comics just after they licensed The Shadow. He accepted the assignment, but when they attempted to force him to accept a writer who was unable to comprehend his storytelling style and the character's basic concepts, Steranko dropped out.

They were 20th-century Merlins who cast word spells on worldwide audiences: John Dickson Carr aka Carter Dickson, whose impossible crimes and lock-room mysteries enthralled millions; Paul Curry, the master of playing card prestidigitation; Clayton Rawson, who conjured the fabulous Merlini thrillers; Martin Gardner, the **Scientific American's** resident genius and puzzle master.

Then there was the inner circle: Walter Gibson, who created The Shadow and scribed 282 of his pulp adventures; Bruce Elliot, who penned the character's "detective" exploits; Orson Welles, who gave the mysterious manhunter his radio voice in the pre-**Citizen Kane** 1930s; and a newcomer who had traded in a career as a performer of wildly innovative close-up effects and hazardous escape work for a brief, yet influential appearance in the comic world.

Each of the Witch Doctors has his moment holding court, and during Steranko's turn, he reveals that earlier in the day, he was assigned to paint covers to The Shadow paperback reprints. The announcement is supercharged not only because of the uncanny coincidence it entails, but because the prime players in The Shadow legend are together in the same place at the same time.

A spontaneous burst of applause shatters the silence; the members–all serious Shadow fans–toast the bizarre twist of fate. None of them, however, realize how deep the coincidence lies.

NO ARTIST WAS MORE QUALIFIED TO VISUALIZE THE SHADOW THAN Steranko. Twenty-five years earlier, as a child, he had discovered the radio broadcasts on WOR New York, and would spend afternoons

buddled against a wooden cathedral radio, enthralled by the ominous tones of Omphale's Spinning Wheel *and the echo-chambered voice that warned, "The weed of crime bears bitter fruit!" Shadow pulps and comics came later, all forming the core of a fated symbiosis that would endure throughout his life.*

What else but fate would explain that out of hundreds of illustrators available–all with more seniority and experience–Steranko was selected to visualize covers for The Shadow paperback series.

Walter Gibson–who had assisted Houdini; had been the confidant of Thurstan and Blackstone; and who had scribed dozens of books about miracle men, magic and psychic phenomena–perhaps explained it best when he categorized the wild coincidence as a textbook case of "psychomagnetism," a word he had coined for disparate elements being drawn mysteriously, yet appropriately together.

Steranko had set a record for rendering more classic heroes than any other artist. A partial list would include Indiana Jones, Sherlock Holmes, Captain America, Doc Savage, Batman, Mike Hammer, Buck Rogers, Sinbad, the Green Hornet, Conan, He-Man, Sheena, G-8, Superman, Luke Skywalker, the Fantastic Four, James Bond, Sam Spade, the X-Men and many others.

Before his Marvel period, Steranko had created and scripted a number of characters for Harvey comics: Spyman, The Gladiator (whom editor Joe Simon in his infinite wisdom renamed The GLOWING Gladiator), and The Sorcerer ("Nobody knows that word, Jim! I'm going to call him Magicmaster!), a superhero strip that mixed white and black magic. At Marvel, he evolved a similar supernatural series featuring an enigmatic stranger named Karstone (an anagram for Steranko). Realistically rendered in the **Tower of Shadows** *style, the strip was rejected by Stan Lee as being too different for the "House of Ideas." (Steranko replaced it with the romance tidbit* My Heart Broke in Hollywood*–his final story for Marvel.)*

For Gibson's haunting manhunter, Steranko painted 27 paperback covers–and became an integral facet in The Shadow legend.

INNOVATIONS IT WAS ABOUT quarter to five, almost closing time. Steranko was waiting for an answer. He had crashed Marvel's bullpen with an armful of art, and–applying the same philosophy that had moved him through a life of razor-edged situations–had nothing to lose by making a pitch to the hotest comics publisher in the universe.

Earlier that day, he had delivered his first pro scripted and penciled story to Tower Comics, a recent contender in the four-color arena which boasted a brood of heavy hitters on their payroll: Wally Wood, Reed Crandall, Gil Kane, Mike Sekowsky, Steve Ditko, and Al Williamson, to name a few. Steranko's presentation had been approved and scheduled for a new 68-page title in Tower's lineup–**Super Agent X**.

Art director Sam Schwartz assessed the 20-page origin story and cover roughs like a wolf in a chicken house. He savaged page after page, finally stating that he didn't even like the shape of a female character's nose! (The woman scientist was patterned on Kim Novak; short platinum hair, straight nose.) Schwartz insisted it be bobbed like Archie's Veronica.

Steranko realized that if he acquiesced, Schwartz would make him jump blindfolded through a flaming hoop next time around. "Maybe in *another* incarnation," he said curtly, grabbing the AD's

right wrist in a paralyzing tight grip with one hand and gently removing the pages with the other. Before the stunned Schwartz could utter another word, Steranko was gone, turning down a major book with his own characters, an assignment other artists would have killed for.

By the time he hit the street, around 59th and Broadway, Steranko had an alternate plan: to head downtown where he had parked his car, stopping at various publishers along the way.

First, Archie Comics, who had recently jumped into the superhero foray with The Mighty Crusaders, Fly Man, and a battery of second raters. The editors welcomed Steranko with open arms, rejected the idea of publishing Super Agent X, but counteroffered with a job to lay out their covers once a month for $10 each. Hardly!

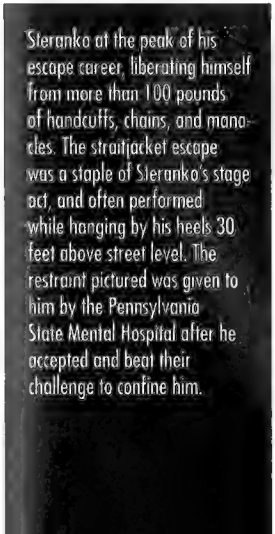
Second, DC Comics, where editor Murray Boltinoff welcomed Steranko with open arms, rejected the idea of publishing Super Agent X, but counteroffered with a job to script one of his books at $13 a page. Closer, but no cigar.

Third, Paramount Animation Studios on 44th Street. Steranko was psyched with energy and somehow drawn to take a chance in unknown territory. Surprisingly, he connected with animation legend Shamus Culhane, who liked the Agent X concept enough to option it for Saturday morning development. (Animation iconoclast Ralph Bakshi was one of the Paramount "grunts" at the time, and Culhane introduced them.) Their final meeting lasted until 4:30, still time to make one final pass. Marvel.

Steranko confessed to receptionist "Fabulous" Flo Steinberg that he had no appointment with Stan Lee. She parried, saying that Stan didn't see wannabes anyway. Steranko insisted, putting the art into her hands and telling her he had just quit Tower, passed on Archie, cold-shouldered DC, and had been hired by Paramount. She doubted that Stan could check the work in the few remaining minutes of his day, but she'd ask.

Steranko had taken the day off from the ad agency, but had to be back in Pennsylvania that night to play with his music group The Saints, Inc. Typically, the path his life had taken was as unpredictable as it was impoverished, spinning out like a Dickens novel with a touch of Jim Thompson.

Born a few days after Orson Welles' **War of the Worlds** broadcast, he developed quickly, learning to read before the age of two. He started school at four, and recalls drawing a WWII dogfight in chalk on a 4'x4' concrete sidewalk slab in front of the building. At home, too poor to afford a drawing tablet, Steranko improvised by opening and flattening every envelope that came in the mail and using the plain, white insides upon which to practice sketching. Everything he knew about art was gleaned from second-hand comics an uncle gave him.



Steranko at the peak of his escape career, liberating himself from more than 100 pounds of handcuffs, chains, and manacles. The straitjacket escape was a staple of Steranko's stage act, and often performed while hanging by his heels 30 feet above street level. The restraint pictured was given to him by the Pennsylvania State Mental Hospital after he accepted and beat their challenge to confine him.

Although he dreamed of becoming an architect, his father, limited in aspiration and hope, saw him as a factory worker. "Why're you *wasting* your time and Crumb, was an artist who could simultaneously work within and expand upon a tradition, who could assimilate great quantities of material, stamp his own personality upon it, and produce something that felt familiar and new at the same time. And it was new. It was as if two plus two suddenly equaled *five*! The glory of Steranko's work is his absolutely unique sense of design. No one before or since has been his equal. The tragedy of Steranko's work is that he abandoned the graphic story form too soon. It's as if Welles quit after **Ambersons** and left us no **Touch of Evil** or Kubrick quit after **Strangelove** and left no **2001**. Steranko turned his back on what he did best–too soon. I look at his early work and I want to shake his hand. Then, I just want to shake him.

Paul Gulacy

TOP COMIC ARTIST AND GRAPHIC STORY TELLER

Anyone who doesn't appreciate Steranko's work is a dope! The '60s were a time of civil rights, the Beatles, moonshots, James Bond, Kennedy, Vietnam–and, in the comic industry, Steranko was the big news. His strong sense of graphic design ran parallel with Jimi Hendrix' guitar riffs. What creative cosmos he was tapping into, we'll never know. And if asked, he wouldn't tell you anyway.

Steranko never backed away from exploring new avenues or taking on a challenge. Whether it be drawing comics, writing, painting, or publishing, he is the consumate experimenter and risk taker. Knowing all of these things and knowing the man, I'd have to say what sets him apart from me and our peers is his experiences as an escape artist. Steranko would be handcuffed to railroad tracks–with a train coming–and escape in the nick of time. He'd be thrown off a bridge chained inside a trunk and break out underwater. That's the separation, what makes Steranko uniquely Steranko.

I once asked him what he felt he excelled at the most and he told me it was his slight of hand magic. I also know he loves rockabilly music and has an affection for the 1930's period. Of us all, Steranko is the most blessed. As a friend, he's a very giving man with strong moral fiber and a golden heart. That's why I love the guy.

Roman Coppola

SECOND-UNIT DIRECTOR ON DRACULA.

There are straight comics and far-out comics, and Jim Steranko is in the vanguard of the far-out! And that's what's come to the forefront of modern comics–some really wild imagery, which is slowly making its way into the movies. Jim's one of the authentic originators of that style.

Greg and Tim Hildebrandt

SUPERSTARS OF FANTASY ILLUSTRATION

Jim Steranko's diversity is an inspiration to us! His drawing, design, color, composition, and style are unmatchable!

Will Eisner

FAMED COMICS PIONEER, CREATOR OF THE SPIRIT

I've had only occasional personal contact with Jim. I always found him bright, friendly and a man of little equivocation. I recall one such meeting during which we spent almost a week together at an Australian

comic convention. We had some good "shop talk" and I discovered we had a somewhat parallel philosophy about the comic medium. The only difference I can recall is his preoccupation with graphics was more intense than mine. There are two major Steranko accomplishments that stand out in my mind. The foremost was his huge **History of Comics**. It is a monumental work and, in my opinion, the premier documentation of comic books' origin years. The other is his very experimental detective series in which he sought to bridge or wed film technique with the print medium. His treatment of replacing outline with stark shadows was very innovative.

Dave Stevens

CREATOR OF THE ROCKETEER

As far as I'm concerned, Steranko is God. Always has been. Always will be.

Frank Frazetta

WORLD-CLASS FANTASY ILLUSTRATOR

Jim is a great personality, one of a kind, multi-talented. I'm saying all this so he'll say nice things about me next time around! I like Jim a lot. His painting work is tremendous! Very strong, very powerful. Man, when he was up-and-coming, he said 'Frazetta, you're older than me and I'm young, but I'll catch you' (laughs). He was *very* competitive, which I thought was wonderful. And I said to him, 'Okay, Jim, but I gotta tell you, it's not as easy as you think!'. I have nothing but good things to say about Jim, except I don't know why he didn't pursue art more because he had tremendous potential. I've taken him to task about it, in fact.

SUDDENLY, BEFORE ANY CAN MAKE ANOTHER MOVE, THE YELLOW CLAW'S ENTIRE COMPLEX IS ROCKED BY AN EAR-SHATTERING PARODY OF PENETRATING BRUTE FORCE! RIPPING HEXORAD-Y UPWARD THRU STEEL AND STONE, COMES AN INCREDIBLE, TAPERING LOBSTER-LIKE BOOM, LIKE SOME KIND OF TITANIC MONSTER OF THE DEEP! FLAILING WITH SPIKE AND SHEAR, THE COLOSSAL DREADNOUGHT CLEAVES ONWARD, WHILE A VANGUARD OF SHIELD'S SUICIDE SQUAD ATTACKS WITH THE VEHEMENT FORCE OF A W-O TIDAL WAVE!

drawing pictures?" he would say to his son who practiced on a battered wooden kitchen table long after the others had gone to bed. No relative had attended college; they were all blue-collar drones. Why should he be any different?

Steranko spent his Saturdays scouring the neighborhood for discarded soda bottles (which he turned in for two cents apiece) and old newspapers (bundled and sold for scrap at thirty cents per hundred pounds). Pennies were saved for Speedball pen points and Higgins colored inks.

He supplemented his raggedy comic collection with **Prince Valiant, Johnny Hazard,** and **Beyond Mars** strips clipped from scrap newspapers. Siegel and Shuster's Superman, Kirby's Captain America, and Toth's Johnny Thunder were early inspirations. Maneely, Powell, and Crandall followed, then Wood and Williamson. They were all his teachers.

He had been an honor student until tenth grade, when the family moved to another location and a series of brutalizing personal tragedies pushed him into an emotional darkness and close to a psychotic brink.

In high school, other conflicts conspired to erode his creative motivation. Because he used an innovative lettering style, an art teacher tore a major design project to shreds in front of the class and failed him *for the year*. His yearbook concepts were given to other staffers to render and take credit for. He was passed over for art awards and scholarships which inevitably went to less talented students. No one was interested in what he had to offer.

Frustrated and angry, he junked everything he valued and worked for–his ambition, his dreams, his will to create–and in the process, stripped down to primal form, answering any conflict with exposed-nerve sensitivity and seething rage.

Whether he had failed in reaching his own goals or been stonewalled by the selfishness of others, he fell very far from grace and did not care. He was drowning in social and moral poverty. He became an outcast, a solitary figure, trying to erect an impenetrable wall around himself. Long before it was fashionable, he grew his hair long, dressed in black, and did not smile for three years.

He withdrew into a period of bitter isolation, rebellious and destructive, with his demeanor ranging from sullen to surly. The moment he realized he had nothing to lose gave him the metaphysical freedom to dare anything without fear of reprisal.

The famous four-page climactic spread from **SHIELD** 167, which concluded the nine-part Yellow Claw serial. The concept is still unique and unduplicated after a quarter century.

PERSONAL NOTE TO AL.. FAITHFUL SHIELD FOLLOWERS FROM JIM STERANKO: IT WAS ABSOLUTELY IMPOSSIBLE TO PRESENT THIS MIND-BENDING SUPER-SPECTACLE IN ANYTHING LESS THAN A POWERFUL, PANORAMIC FOUR-PAGE SPREAD,' TO GET THE FULL EFFECT, OF COURSE!, REQUIRES A SECOND ISH PLACED S DE-BY-SIDE. BUT WE THINK YOU'LL FIND IT TO BE WELL WORTH THE PRICE TO HAVE THE WILDEST ACTION SCENE EVER IN THE HISTORY OF COMICS.'
--- DARN! NOW I HAVE TO SPEND ANOTHER TWELVE CENTS! --- STINKY STAN!

He was ready to detonate.

The daredevil stunts of his youth had cloaked him in a false shroud of invulnerability. Lady Luck lived in his shadow. His greatest highs were generated when he tempted fate, knowing he could escape the reaper's grasp–and not giving a damn if he didn't.

Brawls were common. His teen-punk pranks verged on death wishes. For protection, he began carrying two fully-loaded pearl-handled .38s in his jacket. There were back road races in stolen cars, gang rumbles, and worse. One of his ploys was to challenge the biggest and baddest to a round of Russian roulette, his gun or theirs. He would always go first; more often than not, they'd chicken out. He was often tempted to put a bullet in them. It was not wise to argue when he had a gun in his hand. Occasionally, Steranko would squeeze off the next shot just for the hell of it, aiming at the tires of a rival's hot rod, sometimes blowing one out. He did what he could to redefine delinquency.

One day in his senior year at school, Steranko was refused entrance. (They didn't throw him out, they just wouldn't let him *back in*.) He switched to night school and graduated to please his father. When he was 17, he moved away from his family at Christmas. He got a one-room apartment with an ugly, green linoleum floor, painted signs for pocket money, and found consolation at the movies (sometimes three a day).

At the local YMCA, he pumped iron and boxed, and it was there that another turnaround began. A sparring partner mentioned that a new newspaper had set up local quarters and might be looking for a staff artist. Steranko phoned from the locker room, was connected to the art department, and told that the job had been filled–they weren't interested in his work.

Slamming the phone into its cradle, Steranko raced to his pad, collected a folder of drawings, and showed up at the art department a half-hour later. A veteran commercial artist had already snared the job. "I told you we're *not* interested in your work," the man reiterated firmly. "You can't tell me you're not interested in my work–without SEEING THE WORK!", Steranko riposted angrily. The man was stunned for a moment, then said, "You must *really* want to be an artist?"

"I **am** an artist! And I'll get a job whether you hire or me or NOT!"

Whether impressed or simply defending himself, the man hired Steranko on the spot, *before* looking at his work. "If you want to be an artist that bad, then you'd better start today." He subsequently taught the brash kid the rudiments of commercial art; they worked together for two years. Afterward, Steranko became the art department at a printing firm (learning every reproduction

John Landis

MEGAHIT DIRECTOR THE BLUES BROTHERS AND ANIMAL HOUSE

Steranko's graphics have influenced everybody! Jim's work is a major factor for the comic-book renaissance. He's the greatest!

Jim Shooter

ACCLAIMED WRITER-EDITOR, THE FOUNDER OF BROADWAY COMICS

Steranko brought design to comics. With a relatively small body of work, he introduced a staggering number of graphic innovations. His love, his intensity, his genius *changed* the course of the mighty river of comic's creativity. Like Jack Kirby and Neal Adams, he was, and is, often-imitated but Steranko has maintained his prominence. Even more importantly, he is honorable. Do not tell lies in the sphere of his awareness. Especially about him.

Al Williamson

EC COLOSSUS AND STAR WARS ARTIST

We always got along famously. He's a great guy with a good sense of humor. I love him dearly. What's nice about his stuff is that it's pure Jim Steranko. I've always liked his work, it was different–very satisfying and well composed, interesting to look at. You can see a little bit of this fellow or that fellow, people that he admires, but when he puts it together, it's *all* Steranko. He makes you want to study the pictures. The guy really was ahead of his time.

Looking at **Chandler** reminded me of those great movies from the '30s and '40s. He really gets a mood and sets a scene. He's a helluva storyteller and he drags you in there. The guy is made for

procedure) and later, an ad agency art director.

Now he was about to launch a new career. It was almost five o'clock when "Fabulous" Flo announced that Stan would see him. A moment later, he was in the hallowed sanctum, face to face with Marvel's mighty monarch. Instant rapport!

"Your work's pretty primitive, but there is *something* about it–a certain enthusiasm!" Marvel only published about 20 titles at the time, and Stan gestured to the wall rack behind him. "Which one would you like to do?" Simple as that.

Steranko looked over his favorites–FF, Thor, Captain America–and realized it would be suicidal to follow Kirby. He pointed to one of Marvel's most chaotic, neglected, and ill-developed characters.

"Nick Fury! I can do something with him."

It was an understatement that changed the course of comic history.

THE MOST SURPRISING aspect of Steranko's four-color career is that his reputation–ranking him among the form's authentic warrior-gods–is based on less than 30 comics!

To adequately gauge his contribution, one must consider that most artists have spent their lifetimes without gaining a fraction of his fame or following. The inequity is only unjust, however, when comparing quantity with quality. When, for example, pop-culture scholars Philip Fry and Ted Poulos assembled the catalog for the Steranko exhibit at the prestigious Winnipeg Museum in 1978 (the opening had the largest media turnout for any artist ever exhibited at the facility, and Steranko was subsequently awarded the key to the city in a ceremony at the mayor's office), they confirmed discovery of 73 original storytelling innovations *in his Marvel canon alone.*

In the pantheon of American comic artists and writers, those whose work has become true doctrine could be counted on the fingers of both hands. Contemporary offerings rely on precisely the same rigid foundation established in 1929's **The Funnies**. *Only a few have made credible advances: Kirby, Kurtzman, Toth, Krigstein, Eisner, several others–and Steranko.*

In fact, most, if not all, of today's most-imitated graphic approaches–such as those popularized in the Image product–derive directly from Steranko's work of two decades ago. Although he was not the first to draw ultra-muscled figures, full-page pinups, over-rendered anatomy, dramatic backlighting, action groupings, and big guns, Steranko was the first to combine *them into a single, unified vision fusing style and substance–and make them his trademark. His covers*

TALON © 1973 JAMES STERANKO ARR

A gallery of superheroic figures. Most, if not all of Steranko's major figures–especially those on covers, splashes, posters, and interior action pages–reflect his philosophy of the human form, an aesthetic position dedicated to making each a statement about dynamism, beauty, dignity, spirit, and courage. (He expounded on the LAws of action in **Mediascene** 32.) The primary figure on the Palladium game-book cover **Heroes**, is one of the most swiped in comics' history. Talon is Steranko's barbarian hero; the image was created for a poster used to introduce the character in 1973. RIGHT: The definitive young, powerful Superman from issue 400. FAR RIGHT: One of The Fly covers, for which Steranko rendered the figures in line and painted the background. A stylized Batman against a paranoid Gotham skyscape.

movies. He could *direct* a movie. Absolutely!

Sin City kind of reminded me –'Hey! Jim did this 20 years ago!' I love Miller's stuff, but it struck me immediately that he looked like Steranko. All I can say about Steranko is that he's gotta come back.

Bill Sienkiewicz

AWARD-WINNING ILLUSTRATOR

Steranko pioneered the use of subtext as a language in the Comic medium.

To me, he was the first artist whose graphic design sense was so totally integrated into the storytelling gestalt, not only by what he chose to put into the panels, but by how he arranged the

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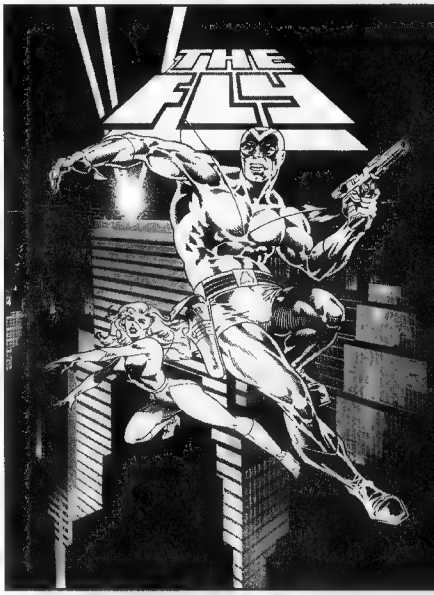
for **Nick Fury and His Agents of SHIELD** 1 *and* **Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD** 1 *perfectly define the techno-mythology upon which most current comics are predicated.*

Steranko alloyed those elements with sweeping, cinematic storytelling and labyrinthine plots; Stan Lee once defined the differences between their narrative approaches by explaining that he told complex stories in a simple *way and that Steranko told simple stories in a* complex *way.*

The matrix for that pattern is reflected in Steranko's life and a multimedia career that reads like a channel-surfer's nightmare.

As a filmmaker, he has collaborated with such superstar directors as Spielberg, Lucas, and Coppola. Pop media cultists know him as a leading authority, writer, and lecturer about the liveliest of arts, from cinema to comics. Ask any magician and they'll talk about his revolutionary techniques as a performer at the close-up table or his incredible escape stunts. As an award-winning designer, he has visualized almost 5,000 pages. In his journalistic career, he conducted hundreds of celebrity interviews, written two million words in the past two decades,



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and edited triple that number for magazine publication. Illustrator, gymnast, photographer, copywriter, emcee, historian, carnival fire-eater, male cover model, boxer, musician, singer, locksmith, publisher, the list goes on.

Few figures in the entertainment world have achieved such a wide range of accomplishments with such remarkable results. Even fewer have mastered a chosen art form, then moved on to undertake the challenge of another. Steranko is about to do it again.

"Since I bowed out of book-a-month slavery years ago, the field has opened up to a magnitude of extraordinary possibilities, yet most comics offer little more than a teen angst, nihilistic violence, mindless contrivances–and irrelevant boredom!

"Contemporary comics hardly suggest a new age of awareness. Superheroes, for example, aren't content unless they're digging shrapnel out of their skulls. At best, comics struggle to be tragically hip and, instead, are severely anomic, but cosmetically appealing to the crayon mentality. Entire series are predicated on the number of lines used to define musculature. Heroes compete with each other by the number of teeth and claws they brandish. And those expressions–terminal constipation!

"What happened to entertainment? Today's comics may be the best *drawn, rendered, and colored ever, but stories and storytelling have essentially devolved to a Mesozoic level!*

The guys I know producing this material are sharp and care about

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Stan Lee

ARCHITECT OF THE MARVEL AGE—'NUFF SAID!

When I first met Jim, and saw his work, I was incredibly impressed. And when his artwork and his stories appeared in Marvel Comics, it was like he burst on the scene like a skyrocket! He was immediately the center of attention of artists and writers and the fans alike. I mean it was amazing because Jim brought a new style and a new excitement to comics. There are certain people in art whose talent makes them very unique and memorable. Jim is one of those people.

Neal Adams

RENOWNED FOUNDER OF CONTINUITY COMICS

Once upon a time in the comic book industry, everybody went away.They stayed away for ten years. And when it was time to come back, nobody was ready because the industry was half-destroyed. What was required was for new people with new ideas, new things to say and new ways to say them, to come in. And luckily, new people came in and invigorated the industry. One of those people was Jim Steranko. He brought a new look, new concepts,new directions, and something new to say. Just when the comics needed new voices, Jim was there with a new voice. And then, the comic-book industry grew up.

Joe Sinnott

HEAVYWEIGHT MARVEL ARTIST-INKER

Comparatively speaking, Jim Steranko created few comic

their work, yet most can't seem to create anything but blueprints for terrorism. Their revolution has turned against them and they've failed to realize it; because of their success, they've become *the establishment–and in doing so, have erected too many self-imposing barricades in trying to maintain a balancing act between rage and chaos.*

"Where do we go from here?

"That's a question I hope to help answer–by jumping back into the business! During the past two decades, I've created about 70 concepts that will adapt to comics as easily as to games, toys, and films. They range from superheroes to juvenile characters; from science fiction to the supernatural, in addition to a number of non-fiction ideas. My intention is to bring them to life a variety of formats.

"When I drew comics, my only tools were a pencil and a brush. Now, they're motion, spoken dialogue, music, sound effects, and visual devices, and my plan is to use them to take a pioneering role in developing the next stage in the evolution of comics-related entertainment–electronic narrative formats.

"I know what formats will emerge in the next ten or twenty years, and it's my intent to develop material for those formats. Currently, we don't have the technology to achieve virtual reality in our living rooms, but it will be here soon–and I'll be ready for it.

"That doesn't mean I'm turning my back on paper product. One of my goals is to bring comics into the 21st Century. I know how to do it and it's on my priority list. I'm well into the development stage of numerous projects, including one that has a unique gaming approach with over 35,000,000,000,000 variations *that will translate equally well into a CD-ROM as a collectible card game. Players who are testing it say it has what it takes to be a strong contender in the gaming market. First, however, I plan to explore the concept in a comic-book series that I'll write and draw myself.*

Steranko's return to the X-Men, penciled in the classic superhero style he developed 25 years ago–embracing his philosophy of the figure–and inked in today's popular overrendered style. The poster is Marvel's first full-color, glow-in-the-dark production, a premium created for 1994's Chef Boyardee campaign. RIGHT: Captain American and Spider-Man posters designed for Marvelmania in 1970. The center image was created for **Captain America** 113, visualizing the characters apparent death, but was rejected by Marvel as being too grim.

"I have not yet allied myself with any established company, although I am negotiating with a number of players, some big, some small. I've worked as a lone wolf most of my life, and realize how important finding the right associate is.

I'm looking for a synergistic situation with partners who have similar philosophies and goals. But if that doesn't materialize, I'll produce product through my own company, Supergraphics; my machinery is already in place.

"Either way, I'll duplicate the kind of excitement I generated with the SHIELD and Captain America series in the past. I have the maturity, the skill, the business sense, the contacts, and the reputation to focus today's entertainment audience on new projects–some experimental, some commercial, but all fun–and I won't disappoint them.

"That's a promise–and if I have to cut a wide and bloody path to keep it, that's the way it'll be!" ■

TEXT © 1995 JAMES STERANKO ARR

balloons or captions–like a silent movie, carefully crafted with outstanding, but organized vision. Through the years, I got to know Jim, and have watched his artistic development, and that of his magazine he publishes. The fidelity of both continually improve. Jim is, indisputably, one of the Everests in a field in which the potential for breaking new ground is unlimited. It is thanks to him that the comic book developed the way that it has. Jim is an outstanding person in the field and–this comes from my gut–a premier person.

Mark Chiarello

GROUND-BREAKING COLORIST FOR DC AND MARVEL

When the great artists of American comics history sat down to create, they thought and drew in black and white. They knew that when they were done, there was another story waiting to be drawn. Color was *not* something they had time to worry about. This held true for all of 'em, even the great greats. Kirby, Toth, Ditko, Wood, and Frazetta. Then came along this kooky Steranko guy who wanted control over *every* aspect of his comics! Everything had to add to the overall storytelling experience, even color! He used colors for their specific psychological strengths; he used white as a color in key panels; he used psychedelic colors to reflect the 'real' art scene of the time. Not every face was colored Y25R25 (comic book Caucasian skin color), not every sky was blue. Hell, he once colored an entire cover blood red

PAT CALHOUN TAKES A NEW LOOK AT STERANKO AND THE HISTORY OF COMICS

I STARTED WRITING ABOUT COMICS after I realized how much I liked to *read* about comics and how little material there was on the subject. Two of the books that made abundantly clear to me the joys of four-color scholarship were the oversized volumes of **The Steranko History of Comics**. Since I came back to the hobby in 1986, after an 18-year absence, they were the ultimate refresher course. I knew that my resources were probably not going to lead me into collecting Golden-Age superhero comics, so the two volumes represented a way for me to get a handle on the era that preceded my own chosen post-war pre-code area of collecting focus.

Steranko–in enviable prose that is the work of an accomplished creative artist–goes back to the pulps with a persuasive argument about how Doc Savage, the Shadow, Zorro, and the Spider are the clearest and most immediate sources of inspiration for Superman and Batman. Steranko concentrates on the creators of the pulp heroes, giving capsule biographies of the artists, full of valuable information and insights.

The same is done for the great newspaper strips and creators: Chester Gould's Dick Tracy, Roy Crane's Captain Easy, Hal Foster's Prince Valiant, Burne Hogarth's Tarzan, Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon, Milt Caniff's Terry and the Pirates, and Lee Falk and Ray Moore's Phantom–the first hero to wear a mask and tights.

As Steranko winds into the actual comic-book era and the transforming event of Jerry Siegel's and Joe Shuster's Superman in **Action** 1 (June 1938) he creates a great read. Anecdotes–like the one of Bob Kane and Bill Finger meeting in Edgar Allen Poe Park to talk about a new strip and producing their first collaboration, Rusty and his Pals, for **Adventure Comics**–swarm at the reader thick and fast, each a prized nugget of four-color history.

While it's always good to have the classics parade by in their luminous glory, it's even better to be steered toward a lesser-known character/title/artist and discover something special. I'm particularly indebted to Steranko's praise of Airboy and the Heap, which helped me get into Hillman's series, now one of my favorite titles. Jim is always quick to recognize how much solid storytelling figures into the formula for a successful character. The Hillman stars were created by Charles Biro, and carried on by editor Ed Cronin (who presided over many good writers and artists including Fred Kida and Ernie Schroeder). Airboy was a winning combination of two great character elements. First was the engaging young man and his unique airplane, "Birdie," the wing-flapping wonder. Second was the Heap, that shaggy synthesis of

swamp growth and human body and soul which began as a character in back-up strips but grew into one of the more profound stars of the times. The Heap began as a German flier, downed during World War I. His plane crashed into a swamp in Poland; Baron Von Emmelman should have died. But Nature chose him as the device by which her force could take a part in the world's affairs, creating the part-plant, part-human Heap.

That other great aviation strip, Quality's Blackhawk, gets the full Steranko treatment, too. This section includes some well-deserved devotion to Reed Crandall, a superb craftsman, who helped the Hawks become icons that endured long after the war that spawned them had ended. The Big Red Cheese– Captain Marvel–is here, with a charming overview of the hero that gave Superman a run for his money.

That section also includes a profile of the Binder shop, one of the first comic-art studios. Jack Binder was an eloquent spokesman for the wholesome entertainment value of comic books, and a good artist as well. His brother Otto wrote many of the great Captain Marvel stories and went on to script the Silver-Age Superman. Will Eisner's Spirit, Jack Cole's original shape-changing superguy Plastic Man, and the Captain America, Human Torch, Sub-Mariner triumvirate that sustained Timely through the 1940s–all these stars and their respective second-banana back-up features are examined by a masterful guide through territory that Steranko has studied and loved all his life. It's great to hear Steranko rave about a talent too few have appreciated, like when he justly calls Fred Guardineer "one of the architects of the Golden Age."

The Steranko History's is copiously illustrated with an abundance of covers, as well as panels, promos, pin-ups, and even a complete Spirit story in Volume 2. The books were produced in 1970 and 1972 by his company, Supergraphics. Maybe someday, Jim will publish a Volume 3, with his take on the fabulous late-1940's-early-1950's era.

Although I haven't written about how cool Steranko's art is–like his psychedelic run on **Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD**–the two **History Of Comics** covers tell far more eloquently of his talents than I could: a legion of Golden-and-Silver-Age heroes, heroines, and villains. Check out the mysticism of his Green Lantern on Volume 1 and the rebel-with-a-cause machismo of his Blackhawk on Volume 2–great interpretations! The books are dedicated to Jack Kirby, and Volume 1 has a fascinating foreword by the giant of Italian cinema, Federico Fellini. This page by the great filmmaker, where he remembers calling comics "The key with which to view the world," and goes on to say, "In my films, I seek to find the color and verve of Flash Gordon," is a perfect testament to the power of the comic-strip form. ■

All these stars and their respective second-banana back-up features are examined by a masterful guide through territory that Steranko has studied and loved all his life.

Comic Book Marketplace readers can get autographed copies of the STERANKO HISTORY OF COMICS (Volumes 1 and 2) by ordering with credit cards from 1-800-726-5936 (9-4 ET) or by sending $26, which includes P/H, to SUPERGRAPHICS, Box 974, Reading, PA 19606.

considered him a very dear friend, someone that I've always had a hell of a lot of respect for. He's also been to the school as a guest. Jim used to do magic with cards and coins for Adam and Andy and all of us when he'd come over to the house. Jim knew them 25 years ago.

Steranko was one of the earliest guys to self-publish, to go out on a limb, really, and start his own magazine. And this was despite the fact that he was always as busy as hell; he always had as much work as he wanted and more. But still he wanted to do it his way (laughter)!

His style of illustration has always been extremely clever. What stands out in my mind as far as Jim's stuff is concerned is clarity in terms of storytelling and dramatization, which I've always felt was the most important factor for anybody who wants to be a cartoonist. Communication is what it's all about. And Jim has always been very, very strong in those areas.

David Copperfield

WORLD'S GREATEST ILLUSIONIST

Steranko is an enigmatic character in the world of magic. A rebel, a legend who created a series of escape ideas and showed the world of magic that the art of escapes has no "creative" bounds.

Max Allan Collins

COMIC SCRIBE, NOVELIST, WRITER-DIRECTOR "MOMMY"

Jim and I have several thematic interests. His **History of Comics** was the best I ever read on the subject. He's one of the handful of people over the last 20 years who's actually done private-eye comic books. His **Chandler** is a terrific example of the starkly dramatic drawing style that he developed and perfected. Now, lots of artists do moody, shadowy work, but there's a blobby look to it. Jim's art captures the essence of hardboiled so perfectly that a Steranko image looks like *water would bead off it*! He's perfect for a comic-book noir, because of his heightened use of lighting and shadows. Very sharply defined, moody drawings. Prior to **Chandler**, his comics were extremely cinematic, without that misunderstanding which a lot of artists and writers have of false similarities between movies and comics–they are *different* mediums. But the common factors and the use of smaller panels to convey movement and to play with time was something he did in a very sophisticated way. He also had a great design sense. Few people following him have had the solid underpinnings of traditional storytelling that allowed that design sense and cinematic storytelling to be so effective. In subsequent years, many artists copied the superficialities of Steranko's work, without understanding his storytelling. A lot of modern comic-book artists could benefit from a careful study thereof.

Ray Bradbury

PREMIER AMERICAN NOVELIST AND POET

Steranko and I guested together at several conventions more than two decades ago. Years later, he illustrated my story "The Foghorn" (the inspiration for the classic thriller **The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms**) in an anthology– and it was gorgeous. Steranko is A-1 with

THERE HAS MOST LIKELY NEVER BEEN OR EVER WILL BE A PERSONALITY in the comic book industry as multi-dimensional and complex as Jim Steranko. By the age of 28, when he began on Marvel's **Strange Tales**, he was already established as an ad agency art director, graphic designer, carnival pitchman, escape artist, musician, and had written four books on the subject of magic. This wealth of experience and knowledge enabled Steranko to add a level of depth and vibrancy to all his subsequent creations.

There is so much energy in Steranko's work, due in part no doubt, to the fact that he enjoys the very process and art of presentation to his audiences. Just as his elegant **Steranko on Cards** and **World of Escapes** elevated the field of magic to new levels, so too, his contributions to the area of art expanded the consciousness of an entire pop-culture phenomenon.

Steranko's storytelling is more like that of a movie director than a comic-book artist; his fantastic tales and illustrations consistently include new visual surprises, color treatments, dialogue techniques, pioneering type treatments, narration theories, and even dramatic structures. These aspects, combined with his use of experimental page design, affect the tempo and tone of every story to create a unique and engrossing entertainment experience.

In order to showcase examples of the innovations, scope, and diversity of his work, thirteen of Steranko's finest creations have been selected.

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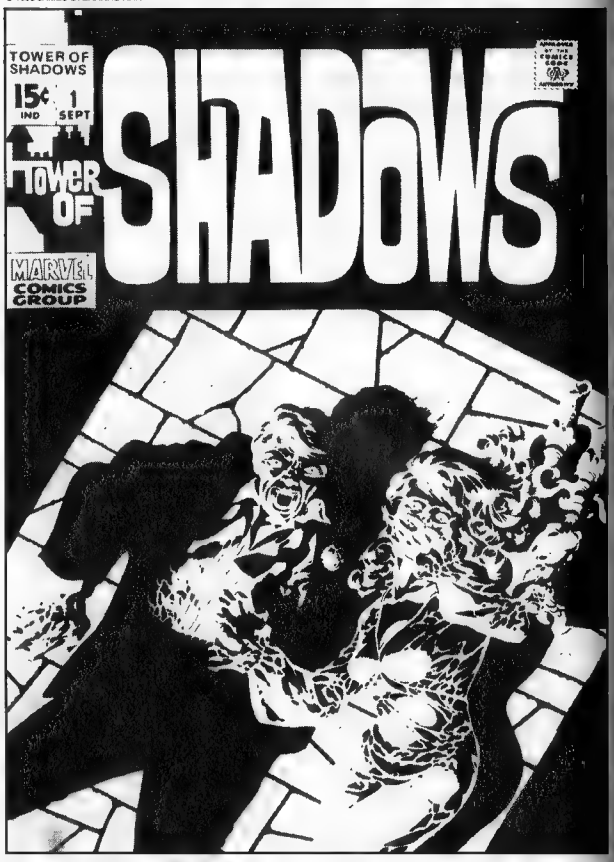

13 STERANKO MILESTONES

STERANKO'S WORLD OF ESCAPES

OCTOBER 1964 GENII MAGAZINE

Prior to his emergence in comics, Steranko was known in the magic field as an innovator in the realm of close-up coin and card magic and escape stunts. A disciple of Houdini, Steranko was not content to simply duplicate his feats, but desired to leave his own mark on the realm of escape magic. Instead of relying on the complex 'gaffed' devices Houdini had created, Steranko experimented with locks at an early age and relied solely on dexterity, a knowledge of lockpicking, and physical strength in his stage appearances.

In this significant work written and designed by Steranko, he explores numerous secrets about locks, escapes, and performance techniques, complete with dozens of photographs and diagrams.

STRANGE TALES 167

APRIL 1968 MARVEL COMICS

It took only three issues of his first Marvel effort (finishing and inking his idol Jack Kirby's pencils on the SHIELD tales) to earn Steranko the opportunity to illustrate the series. He elevated Fury beyond common 007-inspired spy fare and added elements of high-tech gadgetry, cosmic villains, special collage, and optical effects to make SHIELD the most visually stunning strip of the 1960s. In issue 167 (featuring the climax of the Yellow Claw stories) Steranko fused dozens of unique elements to create the series' high point. It spotlights a patriotic cover of Fury and his agents in a stars-and-stripes background. Following the signature Steranko splash page for his story "Armageddon," is a breathtaking–and now classic–four-page action spread of SHIELD's final confrontation with the sinister forces of the Yellow Claw.

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NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD 1

JUNE 1968 MARVEL COMICS

Based on the success of **Strange Tales** and the overwhelming fan response to Steranko's innovative stories, Fury earned his own title and his first book length story. "Who is Scorpio?!" Steranko also rendered one of his most popular covers and other memorable moments, such as the imaginative splash page, a two-page silent sequence depicting Fury's cybernetic decoy infiltrating a SHIELD fortress, and a fantastic centerspread of Fury battling the mysterious villain Scorpio.

NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD 5

OCTOBER 1968 MARVEL COMICS

In his final SHIELD story, the memorable "Whatever Happened to Scorpio?," Steranko created another spectacular, white-background, iconographic cover. In one of his most bizarre pages, he utilized a collage of photographs of optical instruments to represent the SHIELD ESP chamber and Hallucinigenator on page four. Page nine, however, represents one of his cleverest page designs. In a similar fashion to **Strange Tales** 166 (where he used a maze-like pattern to suggest the complexity of the story), he used dynamic puzzle-piece panels to dramatize the process Scorpio uses to impersonate Nick Fury.

CAPTAIN AMERICA 111

MARCH 1969 MARVEL COMICS

In a period of less than three years, Steranko had established his niche at the top of the comic-book field. The dedication to his work is evident in the three spectacular issues of **Captain America** illustrated in 1969. These issues remain, along with the classic work of Jack Kirby, the finest visual treatments of Captain America. They may also be Steranko's most refined superhero efforts. **Captain America** 111 features many of the series' finest moments from the classic white cover (similar to **SHIELD** 5 and **X-Men** 49), to the arcade-inspired splash page, dynamic centerfold, and fantastic surreal two-page spread of Rick Jones' nightmare sequence.

TOWER OF SHADOWS 1

OCTOBER 1969 MARVEL COMICS

Following his successful stints on **Strange Tales**, **SHIELD**, **Captain America**, and **X-Men**, Steranko wrote, penciled, inked, and colored an award-winning seven-page story entitled "At the Stroke of Midnight" for a new Marvel horror title called **Tower of Shadows**. Utilizing small detail panels to heighten dramatic effect and a high-contrast inking style, (foreshadowing his Chandler work), this story marked a departure from his familiar superhero style and denoted a significant step in Steranko's growth as an illustrator.

OUR LOVE STORY 5

JUNE 1970 MARVEL COMICS

In 1970, Steranko illustrated "My Heart Broke in Hollywood" for Marvel's romance title. The story was another bold departure from his previous material and demonstrated his versatility when presented with radically different subject matter. Steranko retained his cinematic storytelling techniques, while using a lighter, more fragile illustration style to better suit the nature of the story.

Clive Barker

NOVELIST, POET, ACTOR, FILMMAKER

Jim is one of the guys that completely changed the direction that comics took. I remember **Agent of SHIELD**, the really amazing stuff, the Scorpio saga. *Amazing!* I had never seen comics like them! 1968. Awesome stuff! He was the first guy who gave us a completely new approach: a love scene made up of details–all in panels without word balloons. He was the guy who gave us genuinely sexy, stylish creatures. He was the guy who gave us comics that generated the kind of excitement that I only felt when I went to the movies. Extraordinary stuff!

Al Weiss

BESTSELLING COMICS ARTIST-WRITER

Steranko was one of my biggest influences. When I first saw his work, I couldn't quite discern exactly what it was that attracted me. Now I know it was his compositions, his use of white space Then he started doing surreal Dali-esque covers, and I said, 'Man! There's something about this that just feels good on your eyes!' Steranko really threw me over the top to where I said, 'Damn! I gotta see if I'm good enough to do this!' The guy is practically a Renaissance artist Sure there's action, design, and energy, but the hallmark of Steranko's work is the intelligence, taste, discernment, finesse, and elegance. Steranko has all that in spades.

Steve Fastner
Rich Larson

SUPER-HOT FANTASY ILLUSTRATION TEAM

Comic artists past and present have aspired to achieve the goal of creating "movies on paper." For me, Steranko's best work accomplishes that aspiration Current filmmakers would do well to try to achieve a Steranko comic "on film."

His comic pages, panels, and cover art are designed to tell a story, but many of the images also have the impact of posters and paintings. I put him up there with Dali, Bob Peak, Vargas, Dore, Wood, and other greats that invested their best efforts in their work. —**SF**

Let's put it this way: if comics ever had a Renaissance man– someone who could do it all, and not just well, but *spectacularly* well–he would be Steranko. I'm not just talking about the usual writing, drawing, lettering, and coloring comics–all of which he did innovatively and influentially. I'm talking about design; typography, page layout, the integration of words and pictures, the use of color, and special effects. Take a look at any issue of **Comixscene** or **Prevue** and you'll see a constant reach for the most jaw-dropping presentations possible. I'm also talking about painting: book covers that jammed pulp, comics and movie poster influences into the most wildly improbable, yet wholly believable paperback art in decades. There's been an explosion of spectacular cover painting since, but Steranko and a few others lit the fuse.

Finally, there are the intangibles, the first of which is scholarship. Steranko has

THE STERANKO HISTORY OF COMICS

VOLUME I (1970) & VOLUME II (1972) SUPERGRAPHICS

Always a student and critic of the comic chronology and the personalities behind it, Steranko contributed two well-written and informative volumes detailing the evolution of the form, from its beginnings through the early comic strips and pulps to the end of the Golden Age. These volumes provide an excellent, detailed insight into the rich history of the comic-art form through the unique perspective of one of its greatest creators and historians.

PREVUE MAGAZINE

1970 TO THE PRESENT, SUPERGRAPHICS

Any list of Steranko achievements would not be complete without his milestone contribution to the field of magazines. Originally produced in tabloid format and titled **Comixscene**, then **Mediascene**, **PREVUE** generated some of the most innovative graphics published in the pop-culture field. While most magazines fold within their first year of operation, **PREVUE** has been published continuously for an incredible 25 years! Jim Steranko is the only artist-writer to break away from comics and publish a successful international newsstand magazine.

Among its many industry accolades for quality and credibility, **PREVUE**, in competition with big-budget magazines, has scored a multitude of film exclusives. These were often so successful that several larger publications "borrowed" **PREVUE**'s design formats and editorial policy for themselves!

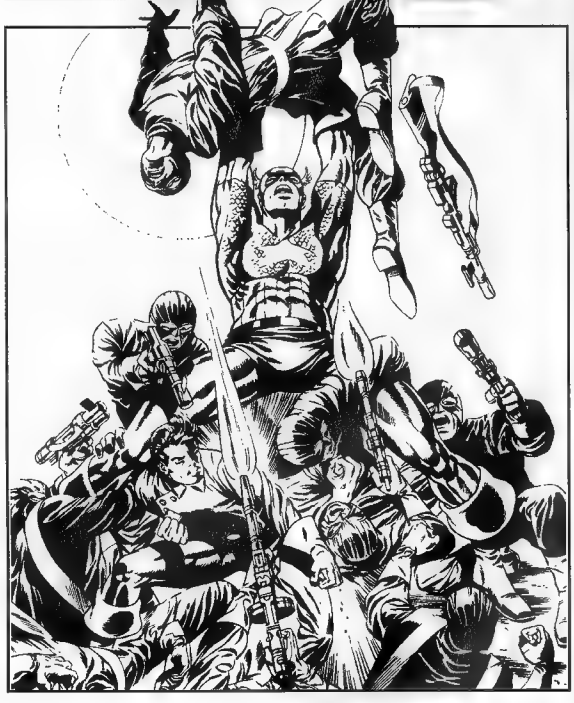
PREVUE represents Steranko's most ambitious effort, one in which he is editor, designer, typographer, and production director. Every page of **PREVUE** magazine is pure Steranko!

AND THE ONE THING I DON'T WANT IN A NEWCOMER IS--CLUMSINESS!
BUT LET'S NOT START OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT! WE'LL PRETEND WE'RE MEETING NOW--FOR THE FIRST TIME!
MY NAME IS WENDY NELSON, MR. LAVALLE!
AND I'M VICTORIA GRANT--
--BUT MY FRIENDS CALL ME--VICK!
"HOWEVER, ARTUR LAVALLE MERELY CALLED ME MISS GRANT IN THE HECTIC DAYS THAT FOLLOWED--"
ALL RIGHT--PLACES, EVERYBODY!
GET READY TO ROLL 'EM!
HE'S FANTASTIC! SO CONFIDENT--SO TALENTED--SO--MAGNIFICENT!
YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME, SWEETIE! HE DOESN'T KNOW YOU'RE ALIVE!
WHY SHOULD HE? I'M LESS THAN NOTHING TO A MAN LIKE HIM!
MISS GRANT! MAY I SEE YOU FOR A MOMENT?
OH YES! YES!
3

THE SHADOW PAPERBACKS

1974-1979 PYRAMID BOOKS

Following his stint at Marvel, Steranko began a new career as a paperback cover artist in 1969, with his visualization of **The Mighty Barbarians** for Lancer Books. While launching his publishing, company Supergraphics, he created paintings for a variety of science-fiction, fantasy, and war novels published by Lancer, Pyramid, Berkeley, and other companies. The most notable and significant of these heralded Maxwell Grant's Shadow pulp series from Pyramid Books, beginning in 1974. Steranko rendered twenty-seven magnificent paintings, depicting the classic manhunter while retaining the ambiance of the illustrators that preceded him. The series not only underscored Steranko's consistently high quality, but stands as a significant contribution to the already rich history of The Shadow, and as an homage to his friend, Walter Gibson (aka Maxwell Grant). Steranko later published through Supergraphics, an excellent companion volume, **Unseen Shadows**, which traced the evolution of his Shadow paintings.



CHANDLER: RED TIDE

1976 PYRAMID BOOKS

Since his early days at Marvel, Steranko often experimented with storytelling techniques which required the reader to participate in connecting the visualized action to complete the scenes. The technique was apparent in much of his early work, such as the opening scene in **SHIELD** 1, the silent love scene in issue 2, and in "At the Stroke of Midnight."

He took another step forward with the creation of **Chandler**, a 120-page graphic novel released in 1976 by Pyramid Books. The work reveals Steranko at the peak of creative control. He designed, wrote, illustrated, and colored the book, utilizing a static two-panel per page format with accompanying text. Steranko's bold, high-contrast illustrations served as a major step in the evolution of the modern comic book and foreshadowed the 'neo-noir' style utilized by many of today's artists.

OUTLAND

JUNE 1981-JANUARY 1982, HEAVY METAL 51- 55, 58

Steranko's graphic adaptation of the Sean Connery SF thriller founded yet another set of comic-book precedents, beginning with a ground-breaking format that visualized double-page establishing shots throughout the story, while using small detail/reaction panels underneath to develop characterization and action. He also created a new, hard-edged art style that perfectly captured the film's sinister, noir-influenced mise en scene. Steranko's ability to create authentic likenesses is readily apparent, but it's his penchant for jaw-dropping settings, complex perspectives, and architectural vistas that make this work one of his most extraordinary efforts.

SUPERMAN 400

OCTOBER 1984 DC COMICS

In 1984, editor Julie Schwartz was retiring and Steranko wanted to repay the kindnesses the veteran had shown him years before he entered the comics field. Steranko agreed to a ten-page tale, the "last Superman story that could be told," for the anniversary celebration. He took a giant step away from–more precisely, an elaboration on–his Outland approach to create comics' first "mural-format" story, one of his most successful experiments. Again using text as a design element, he ingeniously integrated panels with large pin-ups that generated an unusual 3-D effect. Each double page functioned as a new chapter, while delivering breathtaking vistas, such as the "evolution" page, where galactic cities are being constructed on the left and destroyed on the right–with a Superman-family unit bookended by the action. Steranko wrote, drew, lettered, colored, and even handled the special optical fx overlays.

His radical conceptualization, draftsmanship, and design ability have clearly matured to a new stage, and are skillfully balanced by a series of visual surprises and a climax forged in irony. "The Exile at the Edge of Eternity" stands as his most epic and poetic work to date.

Nothing Less Than 100%–one of the immeasurable legacies that Jim Steranko contributed to the comic book industry. A common thread spanning his creations, was his realization of personal artistic freedom. At an early point in his career, he achieved goals which very few artists can claim in comic-book history. In a business that emphasized character over creator, he strove for complete creative control of the final product, to produce a singular vision *without* compromise. While working for Marvel, Steranko progressively created stories on his own terms, in order to ensure maximum visual effect. An even more groundbreaking achievement was his smashing of the comic-book-artist mold when he established his own publishing company, Supergraphics, in 1969.

His determination along with his work ethic and high standards serve not only as a great example to the artists who followed, but also assure his audience that they will receive *nothing less* than one-hundred percent Steranko with each of his efforts. ■ PAUL LEWIS

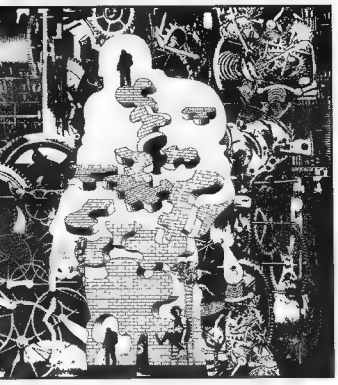
A sampling of the radical style used for the Outland graphic novel. LEFT: **A page from Our Love Story 5. The famous "A" composition battle scene from Captain America 113.** PREVIOUS PAGES: **The censored cover to Tower of Shadows 1 (1969), with a Steranko logo–a seminal artistic style copied by many popular contemporary artists. The Empire Strikes Back wraparound cover to PREVUE 41.**

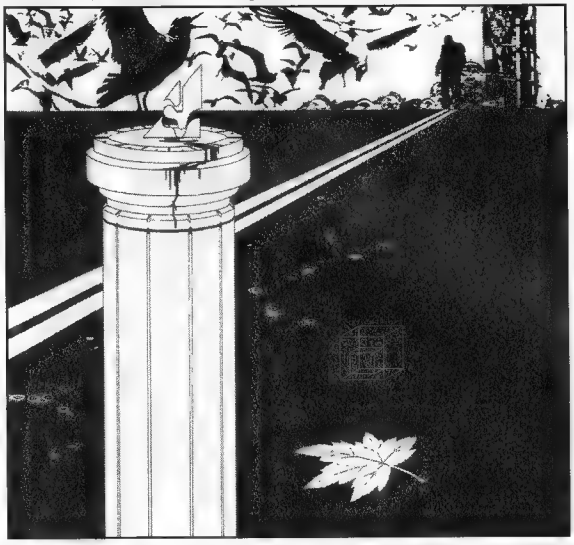
given extensive thought not only to his own work, but also to his profession, its history and influences. Fans who weren't around in 1968 can't imagine the revelation that **The Steranko History of Comics**. At once an exhaustive chronology, exciting behind-the-scenes account, sharp analysis, and treasure-trove of published and unpublished art, it remains today–25 years later–the best work of its kind.

The second intangible is fanaticism. Steranko's comics' work is not voluminous, but it is consistently all-out, full-bore, and to the limit of his considerable capabilities. There are no half measures.

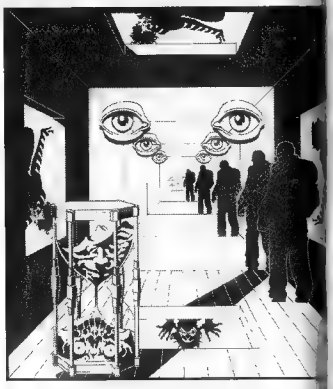
Check out a couple of his lesser known works. A pinup would have sufficed, but his contribution to the 50th Anniversary of Superman comic is, instead, an audacious, mythic, fully realized work of speculative fiction; it gives its subject and the occasion something rarely seen in comics then or since: *Grandeur*. And see also in the **Illustrated Harlan Ellison** his "Repent Harlequin, said the Ticktockman," a powerfully designed, technically innovative 3-D hallucination, the likes of which I guarantee you've *never* seen before. The last time I spoke to Steranko, he was working overtime, as usual, trying to get the color just right on a layout of jungle girl pulp covers for **Prevue**. If you read that issue or the one where he describes visualizing Coppola's **Dracula** or the latest issue, for that matter, you'll see all the enthusiasm, audacity, and talent that blew comics fans out of the tub thirty years ago. And if comics ever have *another* Renaissance, there's a better-than-ever chance that Steranko will be there. —RL ■

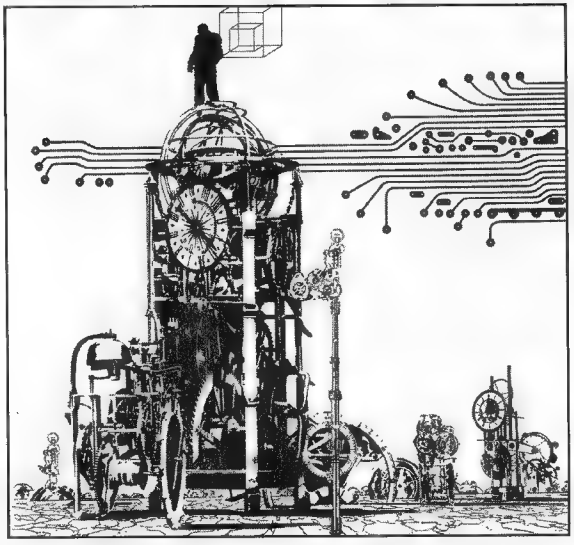
DAVE STEVENS is a preeminent illustrator, who's work ranges from comics to cinema, and is the creator of the Rocketeer.





© 1978 JAMES STERANKO ARR





A sampling of Steranko 3-D images from THE ILLUSTRATED HARLAN ELLISON.

CONVICTION VS. CONVENTION. When I think of Jim Steranko, I think of cinematic staging, relating time by panel design, structure, and placement, employment of high-contrast black and white imagery for stark drama, use of zip-a-tone screens, craftint and self-held color images (consisting of geometric, kaleidoscopic designs for special effects), photo-montages, double-page spreads, quadruple-page spreads– I think you get the idea.

Stylistically, he was miles ahead of the rest of his peers; an artist who plunged headlong into his work with total commitment and clarity of vision, giving absolute purpose to every line he drew.

The reader/viewer isn't merely lead along by the hand, he is propelled! Steranko's work broke with tradition in radical ways, yet never confused or impeded the reader.

His storytelling was calculated precision; always planned out for maximum dramatic effect. In other words, it was built for speed.

His work always gave me an adrenaline rush the instant I would pick it up. It showed me that nothing was written in stone, that pacing and structure need not suffer from, nor be subservient to the tedium of the standard six-panel page. And that convention is meant to be challenged by conviction, when coupled with raw talent and purpose.

Steranko lit the trail for many of us to follow to our own ends, arming us with the realization that this was a medium for experimentation and excellence. After all, we are talking about artistic expression, are we not?

Jim was, in essence, the Will Eisner of his generation; constantly challenging the limitations of the medium, employing unique framing devices, deep-space perspective, dramatic lighting, cinematic sequencing, and the use of "titles" as art elements. These were things that hadn't been considered by much of the industry for many years. He brought a fresh, young, self-assured vitality back to comics that had been long absent, and was much welcomed by its audience.

Some of his most stunning work was, of course, his cover art. Employing combinations of pop-art and op-art, they were at once riveting and inspiring. His best efforts, the SHIELD covers, extended beyond his four-issue run as interior artist, and offer a glimpse of what might have been, had he continued at the helm of the book.

Three of my personal favorites are his **X-Men** covers. They had a glorious elegance to them, as well as a dramatic urgency that, to this day, places them among my favorite comic book images of all time. Interestingly, those covers, when compared with today's over-the-top, pumped-up "Image-style" cover art, clearly show a sense of style, vision, and taste that, for the most part, has escaped the young Turks of today.

Nearly thirty years ago, Steranko laid it down, providing us then-budding artists with a road map to the future of comics illustration that few of us are just now catching up to.

Had he remained in the industry after 1971, who knows what "Marvels" he might have shown us. But he was far ahead of his time, insisting on and fighting for technical advances in reproduction that no one in management or production was ready for in 1968. It's a wonder that he lasted as long as he did in an industry so resistant to change.

Fortunately, we still have access to his limited body of work. It's out there, waiting to be rediscovered and re-assimilated by anyone with the eyes to see, and the understanding to appreciate the man's enormous contribution to this highly visual field. ■

STEVENS ON STERANKO

STERANKO COMICS CHECKLIST

Symbol Key: C=cover art; I=interior art; W=writing credit.

Spyman 1 (9/66) - Steranko created Spyman but only scripted issue 1. His art of the bionic hand, however, appeared in all 3 issues.

Spyman 2 (12/66) See Spyman 1.

Double-Dare Adventures 1 (12/66) - Double Dare Adventures 1 & 2 featured The Glowing Gladiator & Magicmaster, both characters Steranko created, but did not script.

Strange Tales 151 (12/66) CI- His First work at Marvel, Steranko inked Kirby cover pencils; finished pencils & inked Kirby's rough breakdowns.

"The Exordium of X" (1966) I W - Unpublished superhero story.

Strange Tales 152 (1/67) I - Steranko finished & inked Kirby's rough breakdowns.

Strange Tales 153 (2/67) C I - Steranko finished & inked Kirby's rough breakdowns.

Strange Tales 154 (3/67) I - Steranko Plotted, penciled & inked interior. This is the first all Steranko interior art issue.

Spyman 3 (3/67) - See Spyman 1.

Double-Dare Adventures 2 (3/67) - See Double Dare Adventures 1.

Strange Tales 155 (4/67) C I W First Steranko script.

Strange Tales 156 (5/67) I W - Steranko suggested color throughout.

Strange Tales 157 (6/67) C I W Steranko interior coloring, Steranko cover coloring,

Strange Tales 158 (7/67) I W - Steranko coloring inside, No Steranko cover.

Strange Tales 159 (8/67) C I W Steranko coloring on cover & interior art.

Strange Tales 160 (9/67) I W - No Steranko cover.

Strange Tales 161 (10/67) C I W - Steranko coloring on cover & interior art.

Strange Tales 162 (11/67) I W Steranko coloring on interior art.

Strange Tales 163 (12/67) C I W - Steranko coloring on cover & interior art.

Strange Tales 164 (1/68) I W - Steranko coloring on interior art.

Strange Tales 165 (2/68) C I W

Strange Tales 166 (3/68) I W - Steranko coloring on interior art. Steranko also Inked a few panels of Tuska's Dr. Strange story in this issue.

Strange Tales 167 (4/68) C I W Cover & interior coloring.

Strange Tales 168 (5/68) I W

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 1 (6/68) C I W - All Steranko issue.

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 2 (7/68) C I W - All Steranko issue.

Daredevil 42 (7/68) - Steranko only inked one panel; page 12, panel 5.

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 3 (8/68) C I W - All Steranko issue.

Captain America 104 (8/68) - Steranko only inked Fury figures on page 11.

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 4 (9/68) C

Daredevil 44 (9/68) C - Inked Colan's pencils on cover.

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 5 (10/68) C I W - Originally planned for publication in SHIELD 4.

Incredible Hulk King Size Special 1 (10/68) C - Face of Hulk redrawn by Marie Severin.

X-Men 49 (10/68) C - Steranko cover, typography, coloring, & lettering.

X-Men 50 (11/68) C I - Steranko cover coloring, logo redesign on cover, interior pencils.

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 6 (11/68) C

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD 7 (12/68) C

X-Men 51 (12/68) C I - Possible Steranko coloring.

Eerie 25 (1/69) C - Cvr painting.

Captain America 110 (2/69) C I Steranko plotting based on Stan Lee's suggestion.

Captain America 111 (3/69) C I

Captain America 113 (5/69) C I Originally scheduled for publication in Captain America 112.

Tower Of Shadows 1 (9/69) I W Interior coloring. Story made into movie "Shadow House" for American Film Institute. Steranko wrote and pre-directed the film on story boards. Film starred John Carradine and John Fiedler.

"Dante's Inferno" (5/70) I W Unpublished horror story.

Our Love Story 5 (6 70) I - Stan Lee wrote story especially for Steranko.

The Block (1971) C I W - Developed from an idea by Byron Preiss.

Doc Savage 2 (12/72) C

Shanna, The She-Devil 1 (12/72) C

Supernatural Thrillers 1 (12/72) C

Tex Dawson, Gun Slinger 1 (1/73) C

Creatures On The Loose 21 (1/73) C

Fantastic Four 130 (1/73) C

Fantastic Four 131 (2/73) C

Doc Savage 3 (2/73) C

Shanna, The She-Devil 2 (2/73) C

Supernatural Thrillers 2 (2/73) C

SHIELD 1 (2/73) C

F.O.O.M. 1-4 (2/73-Winter/73) Steranko designed the entire membership kit including the full-color 24x23" poster, and edited first four quarterly issues. Created puzzles, word and board games. Contributed art and writing, including a mystery story.

Creatures On The Loose 22 (3/73) C

Fantastic Four 132 (3/73) C

Western Gunfighters 14 (3/73) C

SHIELD 2 (4/73) C

Savage Tales 3 (2/74) I - Three Talon drawings & an article on Talon by Steranko.

Chandler: Red Tide (8/76) C I W - Logo design, interior color, cover painting.

The First Kingdom, Book 7 ('77) - By Jack Katz. Steranko foreword by Steranko (inside front cvr).

The First Kingdom, Book 9 ('78) - By Jack Katz. Steranko colored front & back covers only.
Heavy Metal 51 (6/81) I W Steranko coloring. Outland preview.

Heavy Metal 52 (7/81) I W Steranko coloring. Outland begins.

Heavy Metal 53 (8/81) I W Steranko coloring.

Heavy Metal 54 (9/81) I W Steranko coloring.

Heavy Metal 55 (10/81) I W Steranko coloring.

Heavy Metal 58 (1/82) I W Steranko coloring.

Blade Runner (6/82) C - Cover painting: Marvel Illustrated Book.

Heavy Metal Special 22 (9/82) I W - Steranko coloring.

The Fly 1 (5/83) C - Steranko coloring.

The Fly 2 (6/83) C Steranko coloring.

Heavy Metal 76 (7/83) I - Steranko drew "The Fog Horn" by Ray Bradbury. Excerpted from Dinosaur Tales.

Epic Illustrated 19 (8/83) C Cover painting.

Nick Fury, Agent Of SHIELD Limited Series (12/83) C

Superman 400 (10/84) I W - 10-pg. story "The Exile At The Edge Of Eternity." Steranko writer, illustrator, letterer, & colorist. Julius Schwartz, editor.

Nick Fury vs. SHIELD 1 (6/88) C - Cover painting.

The Green Hornet 1 (11/89) C Cover painting.

The Return Of Valkyrie ('89) C Cover painting.

Superman Archives VI ('89) Forward & afterward by Steranko.

A FINAL NOTE: Researchers should also include: **Nick Fury and His Agents of SHIELD** 1-5, reprints with old & new covers and various Marvel reprints. Jim has also appeared as himself, "The Great Steranko," in numerous Harvey comics, including **Spooky** 126 (9/71) and **Spooky Spooktown** 47 (2/73). In a recent conversation with CBM, Steranko suggested that "Those are probably my best chance at lasting fame!"

Compiled by
EDMOND RHODES, JR.

THE MATT SCHIFFMAN REPORT

The Post Gold Rush!

Here we find ourselves once again suffering from post San Diego depression. Should I have bought that last book? Did I spend too much? Not enough? Did I miss something? What is happening in the market? Well, I can't help you with most of those questions, but I can report on the state of The market in light of the SD convention... and yes, you probably should have bought that last book.

Those of you that have yet to make the pilgrimage to San Diego, please don't let my next comments deter you from ever going. The San Diego Convention begins (officially) at 10:00 A.M. on Thursday, and that moment is one of the highlights of comicdom. But, pre-San Diego, the time frame of a week before and up to 10:00 AM Thursday is where the true behind the scenes action takes place.

The Week Before

In anticipation of San Diego, many collectors find themselves contacting their respective dealers in order to purchase a few last minute items. Their intentions being that the price would certainly rise at San Diego and then in all likelihood still sell, and thus another opportunity lost. Here are a few sales that occurred the week previous to the Convention: Human Torch #1 (#2) FN+ $7,200; More Fun #61 VG $895, Adventure #72 VF- $5,150; Wonder Woman #105 VG/FN $425; Startling #48 NM $425; All New #1 App. VF- $1,000; Showcase #45 VF/NM $200; Sheena #6 FN/VF $175; Dagar #21 GD/VG $65; Wings #92 VF+ $125; and Captain America #8 FN $1,700.

Plenty of activity occurred before the doors opened on Thursday morning. I watched as a dealer put up "their best" on their display racks, and then had those books sell immediately to other dealers cruising the aisles for just such material. These dealers marked them up even higher and then resold them again, all in the first day.

Which books received this special treatment? Schomburg covers, especially his airbrush work. Any Good Girl (especially Fox) that wasn't priced into the stratosphere moved very fast. There were quite a few collectors looking for classic Good Girl covers, but were not rewarded as they hoped they could be. These books are viewed as extremely undervalued and multiples of Guide up to a ceiling of $1,000 doesn't seem phase collectors. These books just don't seem to be that available. As one market expert commented "many of these books could be purchased in quantity not that long ago... and for under $20 each." The big question is "Where is the incentive to sell them if minimal capital is not tied up in these books in the first place?"

Examples of sales in this area include Startling #49 VF/NM Mile High $1500; Seven Seas #6 VF/NM $1,200; Phantom Lady #16 VF $765; All New #8 FN $195; Exciting #60 VF- $165, #62 VF/NM $300; Thrilling #65 FN $50; Black Terror #2 App. VF/NM $625; Black Terror #6 VF $140; Zago #2 FN/VF $185; Fight #1 VF/NM $1,300. Honestly, anything in great shape did reasonably well, even at multiples of Guide.

Mile High Books

With their mystique ever increasing, Mile Highs continue to lead the way. They sold very well, and their multiple price structure continues upward. A unique trend was developing at the convention regarding MH books. Collectors were seeking any Mile highs for under $1,000... the more esoteric the better! These books are now being considered a great buy. Gem Comics #1 Mile High VF/NM $125; My Love Affair #1 Mile High VF- $1400; My Secret Story #27 VF+ Mile High an incredibly low $48!

The "Post-Gold" Rush

There is always that group of collectors that seems to be way ahead of the pack and when a trend finally solidifies, these collectors emerge with just those great books... but the difference is that they were purchased a year earlier at a much smaller

continued on page 74

MARKET REPORTS

GREG PHARIS & DAVE GRISEZ
San Diego Comics & Collectibles
San Diego, California

Welcome to the post San Diego Con report. While we will attempt to update you with facts and figures, we would like to talk about a few noticeable trends.

Golden Age was the golden key that unlocked the collectors wallet at this show! Silver followed hard on those golden heels but for the most part, only in high Fine or better. Everyone asked for keys, Good Girl art, and associated paraphernalia... all was very hot (and trendy) and only high grade Marvels sold for us (if at all).

Sales included: More Fun #71 (front cover + pages Fine... back cover half missing and thrashed) $325; Blonde Phantom #12 VF++ and Action #47 FN+ the pair for $900; Fantastic Four #8 a beautiful VF for $400. (These were all consigned books.)

Toys took an interesting turn. While Star Wars lagged a bit, a new generation has entered the collectible figure market. He-Man, Voltron, and Transformers were a surprise big hit and rapid seller at our tables. Disney memorabilia was warm while robotic styled figures and space toys and guns moved briskly.

Here's a few interesting highlights: Battery operated bikini-clad drink-mixing figure from 1969 $45; a lot of Snoopy Avon (six pieces) from 1969 to 1972 boxed and beautiful for $115; Man from U.N.C.L.E. THRUSH gun (loose but complete)$25.

Recent store sales include a Spider-Man #400 VF $175; All American Men at War #127 VG $150; Flash #105 VG+ (with spine split) for $600.

I guess that this all goes to show that vintage comics are still the prime movers that fuel this market.

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SCHIFFMAN REPORT

Continued from page 72

cost. So the question is, what are those future-thinking collectors buying now?

Using their past track record as a future indication, the trend is towards books from 1946-1955. Science Fiction, Mystery, Good Girl, Crime and Horror priced below $1,000 are taking off. As I've mentioned before, buried within this era are some of the greatest oddball and classic covers to be found in the entire history of comics. Very few dealers had these types of books at SD, but those that did sold them very quickly. Stamp Comics #1 VF+ $1000; Our Army at War #1 FN $720; Journey Into Fear #1 VF+ $200; Jo Jo #15 VG/FN $70; Captain Science #3 VF $240; Mystery Tales #6 App. VF++ $90; Red Warrior #1 FN $85; Strange Worlds #1 VF- $350; Strange Worlds #2 VG/FN $1400; Feature Books #57 VF+ $210 and Fight Against Crime VF/NM $75.

Silver Age

The Silver Age was poised to move either up or stay stagnant at San Diego. Dealers had their stock repriced to reflect the current market, (except Amazing Fantasy #15, Amazing Spider-Man #1, Showcase #4, and Fantastic Four #1). If a book is considered a key and was in high grade, it sold quickly. I saw collectors buying stacks of higher grade Tales Of Suspense and Tales To Astonish, two titles considered very slow over the past year and a half.

DC War

The true name of the Silver Age game at San Diego was DC War books "The Big Five" were on many collectors lists, although most went unfilled as there was just not enough of these books to go around. The Holy Grail of war books, Our Army at War #81, was slightly dethroned by Our Army at War #83 Most agree that #83 is much more difficult to locate than the "impossible 81", and there are those that champion #83 as being the first "true" appearance of Sgt Rock. There were only three copies at the show and they sold quickly the first day

Sales examples in this area include Our Army at War #81 GD $300, #81 FN- $575, #83 GD $180, #61 VF/NM $325. Other non DC war sales include Brave and Bold #1 FN $500, #4 VF $325, #23 FN/VF $285, #28 VF $2,200, Showcase #4 FN+ $7,200, #20 FN $225; Justice League of America #1 VF- $1,800, #46 NM $75; Green Lantern #1 App. VF/NM $2,400, #40 NM $350, #59 FN $90; Amazing Fantasy #15 FN- $4,800.

Keep an eye on any high grade DC War books over the next year or so.

1970s Books

I circulated quite a bit at San Diego and found myself talking to many collectors searching out those esoteric 1970s books. They had been hopeful that the dealers were going to take heed to the market demands, and bring this type of material They were ready to spend good money to locate these hard to find books, but unfortunately, the books were just not there in much quantity. Does this indicate a true scarcity of this low print run material, or just ambivalence on the part of the dealers? Probably a mixture of both. Those sales that did occur, should give notice to those holding these books that there is a valid and high demand market out there.

1970's Sales: Supernatural Thrillers #5 NM $12; Ghosts #1 VF/NM $30; Swamp Thing #1 MT $100, #7 MT $35; X-Men #94 VF/NM $295; Strange Tales #169 NM $15; Sinister House of Secret Love #1 VF/NM $40; Marvel Feature #1 VF/NM $100; Marvel 2 in 1 VF/NM $35; Incredible Hulk #141 VF/NM $20.

A Final SD Thought

Once again, San Diego proved to be the true Mecca for comic collectors. Although it is easy for one to become jaded by seeing so much "good stuff" and so many truly rare and expensive books, we must remember that this is indeed "The San Diego Convention" and that this is by far the biggest and best show for comic books in the entire world. I hope to see you there next year. ■

MARKET REPORTS

GREG WHITE
Comic Books & Collectibles
Kissimmee, Florida

Silver Age Books - Much activity as usual. All high grade keys are in demand but tough to find. Sales of books in lower grade (below fine) are slow.

Sales include: Hulk #3 VF $1,100; Amazing Spider-Man #14 NM $1,300; Batman #155 VF $250; My Greatest Adventure #80 NM $375; House of Secrets #161 NM $125; Showcase 37 FN $200; Flash #123 VF $495; X-Men #2 VF $400.

Golden Age Books - San Diego was slow this year for higher priced Golden Age sales. Most of the books that sold were below the $1,000 range. The only recent acquisitions were copies of USA #10 and Adventure #41 and #48.

Recent Sales: Police #5 FN $600; Batman #4 GD/VG $900, #48 VF $400; Fight #34 $42; Blue Beetle #3 VG $195; Donald Duck Book #1 GD $100; USA #7 FN $500.

Original Art and Toys - An active area in San Diego! A huge selection was available. Prices on Silver Age art was outrageous! C'mon fellas… if you don't want to sell the piece, please leave it at home in your collection! There seems to be no shortage of strip art, comic book pages, and even comic book covers. We recently purchased a nice collection of Aurora models from the 1960s. Most of these have already found homes. We also have put up a fine collection of Disney animation art.

Recent sales include: Mickey Mouse Sunday page, 1972 for $400; Scamp daily, 1964 for $200; Alice in Wonderland cel $195; Mickey Mouse animation drawing, 1947 $150; Society Dog Show animation drawing, 1938 $600; Batman Aurora model $350; Davy Crockett Alamo playset $395.

That wraps up our summer. Have a great Autumn. See you next issue!

DEAN SCOVILLE • Comic Detective
Covina, California

A last minute table at the San Diego Comic Con (shared with dealer Tim Branson) kept me from making a liar out of myself, with half the inventory and half the space, we doubled our profits from last year... even while taking Saturday off to join the fun! A great deal of enjoyment was had extorting autographs from Neil Gaiman, Jeff Smith, and Frank Frazetta (!). Other interesting faces spotted in the crowd were Lakers owner, Jerry Buss, and actor Ruben Blades.

On the down side, I noted a conspicuous absence of kids from this year's show. While I think it's great that so many "adults" have proven loyalists within the medium, I would hate to think that the hobby is being price preemptive for the next generation. Is it apathy? Is the $20 per day entry fee proving too costly for our younger fans? Or did the pre-weekend news segment about the availability of pornographic comic books at the convention threaten parents' sensibilities? Regardless of the reason, it is something convention coordinators and dealers should probably concern themselves.

Requested by con-goers: Wonder Woman #105, Giant Size X-Men #1, X-Men #94 (sale FN+/VF for $150) Hulk #181 (sale: FN $125), X-Men (all issues were hot, especially pre-#40, #94-141). The children's summer flick, "Casper," may have "spirited" some solicitations of that title.

Sample sales at the con: X-Men #1 FN+/VF $2,075; Showcase #11 VF- $750, #20 VG $120, #21 VG $90, and #28 FN+ $105; Giant Size X-Men #1 FN- $125. Flash was a good seller at FN to VF each: #19, #112, #113, #119 and #125 for $560. Other sales included Avengers #11 VF $80; Ghost Rider #1 VG $90; several Green Hornets and Robin Hood Tales.

Acquisitions: Daredevil #1, #2 VF-, Incredible Hulk #3 VF (very pretty).

Minor disappointment: With a stack of VF/NM Spectacular Spider-Man #1s priced at $20, we garnered favorable comments ("great price") but NO sales! We did move two Web of Spider-Man #1's below Guide at $10 each.

NICK KRONFELD
Hartford, Connecticut

With the market in full blast, sales are better than ever. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for San Diego. Many dealers reported steady but slow sales. Like last year, prices were very high, but unlike last year, I didn't see books flying off the shelves. My opinion is that this is a sign of the market leveling off, which must happen eventually. As usual, any Golden Age book that I purchase is as good as sold.

Some sales: Action Comics #3 (Restored) VG $2,500, #23 VG $1,100; Adventure Comics #39 VG- $250; All-Star Comics #8 GD/VG $2,500; Batman #1 (Restored) VG/FN $8,700, #6 VG $700; Blue Ribbon Comics #1 FN $600; Captain America #5 VG/FN $1,350; Catman #29 VG+ $450; Marvel Mystery Comics #29 VF $1,000; More Fun #11 FN/VF $2,500, #12 VG+ $900, #46 VF- $800, #50 VF/NM $1,300; Planet Comics #4 VF- $1,100; Sub-Mariner Comics #4 FN- $800; Superman #2 GD/VG $1,800.

Acquisitions: Adventure Comics #61 VG-, Blue Ribbon Comics #1 VF- (Cosmic Aeroplane copy) The Flame #1 VF/NM (Denver copy); Wonder Woman #1 FN-; many others

See you next month! ■

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Here's What I Think!

STEPHEN H. GENTNER
Collectors beware
Another one bites the dust...

I just heard to my complete disappointment that Scotty Moore's and Phil Barnhart's publication "The Comic Archives" didn't generate enough hobby support to even get out issue #1. In view of the incredible press the Golden Age and Silver Age of comics has been getting lately for stunning investor appreciation of value - one would think another quality comics-related periodical could survive. Wrong-o.

It takes an event such as this to make me ponder the tenuous life of a comic related periodical, and the actual "strength" of the hobby to support one (read "interest"). In recent years, there have been several vain attempts to produce comic related magazines. "Comic Value Monthly" died, and really never had the feel of the market. "Comic Collector" went for a while, and then chucked their mostly Silver and Gold format to a new incarnation known as "Combo". "Comic Collector" had one writer who went by the name of James Chambers. His insights were, unfortunately, superficial, yet he at least tried to educate his readership about Golden Age and Silver Age material. "The Comic Source" has tried and tried to be a contemporary periodical where buyers and sellers could have a venue to get together. On the face of it, John Warren's concept was great, but the lead time from when books listed to sell were available and when buyers even saw it, was too long. Consequently, I found out (as I'm sure many have), that the books listed were always gone. Long gone. Even to the point where some dealers would laugh at how long ago a given book was for sale. The articles were interesting though, featuring writers such as Keith Contarino and Dave Alexander, among others. But the primary function of "Comic Source" to date, has been less than stellar.

The original "Comic Book Marketplace" carved a niche for itself as a great source of information on our hobby. When Bob Overstreet hired CBM's publisher to assume the editor's role for the Overstreet Comic Book Monthly (and Quarterly), I felt that the cottage industry feel of the original Marketplace disappeared. The fact that futures were "hitched to Overstreet's 'star' leads me to think that a more stable funding mechanism to support the magazine came about. As tenuous and as

difficult survival is for a comic related periodical, I was initially happy about it, and glad that Bob O. supported it. The first few issues of the new Overstreet Monthly were not too far off the original Marketplace; there were interesting articles about Gold and Silver material, presented by credible people in the hobby. Gary Carter has the uncanny knack of being able to get in touch with, nurture, and hold together as diverse and squirrely a cadre of writers as God put on this planet. All the while with humor, knowledge of his own, and a wicked editor's pencil.

Time wore on, and the look and feel of the new Overstreet Monthly started to change. More and more articles about newer material were being injected to try and capture the younger market. The original Marketplace stood on the merits of the history of comics, not on new material. Here is where the fundamental change occurred, and I feel ultimately doomed the monthly. I liken this change to a car dealer who for his whole life sold classic cars and vintage racers, to suddenly having to make increasing room in the showroom for "Yugos" and "Neons". Gary Carter's brainchild, The Overstreet Quarterly ("picks up where the original Marketplace left off") was actually pretty good, I thought, but I never heard that sales were extensive enough to please the powers that were. Enter Steve Geppi. We now have completed the schism between "new" and "old" with "FAN" for new, and the revived "Comic Book Marketplace" for old (again).

The fact that history shows us that magazines dedicated to Golden Age and Silver Age material have failed is troubling; Moore and Barhart's effort died a-borning. All the others (and ones I haven't mentioned) have gone the same way, a limping, lingering death. Why?

When one looks at the comic market today, we are divided into new and old camps. The newer readers and collectors buy all the new material, and support their high priest of comic wisdom - WIZARD. You can't fault their success, nor the length of time and advertisers they have gathered. It's remarkable. Also in the "new" camp is FAN.

Before periodicals like Comic Book Marketplace, the annual big Overstreet Price Guide was all we old collectors could chase other than fanzines. (I'll leave "fanzines" out for now, as the focus of this editorial is on monthly "for pay" periodicals). That glorious day in April each year when we got the report card on how all our books were doing monetarily; neat articles and color pages of

long forgotten comic treasures. But the "big Guide" gave new comics values, too, and traversed new and old equally. Younger kids supported the big Guide as well. Where is and how large is the body of old comic collectors? Why are they so unsupportive?

I've been collecting comics so long, and have become so ingrained in my own comic-collecting goals, that sometimes I become too insular. I talk with a small group of brother collectors who share my joy of the hunt, the find, and owning neat old comic books. My supposition at this point is that there aren't enough of us... and if there are enough of us, then we as a collective body are so damn cheap and shallow, we don't support periodicals aimed right at us!

You would think that the speculators alone would purchase enough "data" to be advised in their investments to cover themselves with sufficient information through industry magazines. I feel though, that the 'comic-history' magazines don't provide consistent, accurate, well-laid out pricing and sales info to cover them, circulation wise.

"Who cares about comic history? Who cares who drew various comics or who wrote them? Who cares what was happening historically... like wars, perceived communist aggression, and like? Who cares what influence these factors had and how comics reflect our times? Gentner, why do you get so sweaty over something as trivial as funny-books? No one cares. No one buys them!"

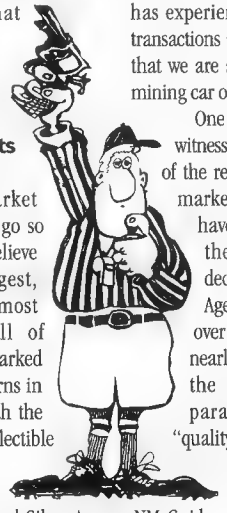
Instead, all I hear is "Hey, does it have pricing in it? How much did my Spider-Man #129 go up? Cool!"

I think it would be wise of the surviving comic history magazines to seriously consider what has and is happening in the buying public's mind. The impact of cleverly written and interesting comic history needs to be supported by reliable, consistent, and well laid-out sales and pricing. Otherwise, who cares that Phantom Lady changed from issue #13 to #14? Who cares that Batman had a gun on him in issue thus and so? The average new collectors, and tragically, the average old collectors just don't care. These historical factors push the prices up and down and show where they stand now.

I personally buy, read, and enjoy magazines which discuss the historical underpinnings which relate to how comics were produced. I revel in good research and new minutiae about comic history. Knowing how, why, and under what circumstances certain comics were published, matters to me... but I am a student of history. I have to grudgingly admit that not many collectors share my love of the whole package. The look, the feel, the history, the smell, the condition, and the value of a comic all play my collector's collective like a harp - but too few people are listening to the music.

I urge you all to support comic-history periodicals. After you have a book and the value is appreciating - why not learn why it is? If prices are all that move you... I feel sorry for you. You're missing out on fun stuff. To all the "old" collectors like me, please people... drop a couple bucks and enjoy the fruits of many collectors labors to bring life to the comics we adore. The alternative is no medium for shared comic knowledge... and that would be a crime!

JASON EWERT
Time Out! Don't price it 'til you know how much its worth!



Where does the market stand overall? I will go so far as to say that I believe it is the most stable, strongest, healthiest, fastest growing, most enthusiastic market in all of collectibles! I feel that it is marked with the greatest financial returns in the shortest period of time, with the least amount of risk of any collectible I have ever researched.

To merely state that the market of quality Golden Age and Silver Age comics is "hot" is a gross understatement, but also a gross misinterpretation. To state that something is "hot" conjures up ideas of something that will, in a relatively short time, start to fade, become unpopular one day, or "have its day in the sun" and then depart. Golden Age and Silver Age comic collecting is remote from activities that are "the in thing" or "in vogue" but in time will become "an old gray mare."

Quality GA and SA comic collecting is a runaway mining car full of freshly mined gold which has gathered so much speed, the iron casters have lifted off the rails, and the car is currently cruising through the air towards an unknown destination. How can the car be stopped? It can't! That's because fewer and fewer quality books are leaving collections while more and more collectors and investors are entering the marketplace.

This situation is creating record prices on quality material every day! Name another market where a NM condition item is Guide valued at "X" and the asking price of 3 to 4 to 5 X "X", and still have 7-12 people lined up ready to purchase it? I don't know of any.

There are examples of sales at 3 to 4 to 5 X Guide for FAIR condition copies of certain books, with 20 potential customers. And for an extreme example, consider the sale of a certain book for multiples... with missing pages or without a back cover? The market has experienced examples of all of these transactions and I think we should all rejoice that we are all part of the most fun, fastest mining car on earth!

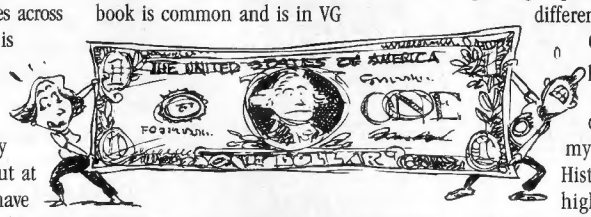
One area of concern is a trend I have witnessed over the last year. It is a result of the repercussions from such a strong market. I feel dealers and collectors have been inaccurately interpreting the runaway market, and have decided to price nearly all Golden Age books (regardless of condition) over Guide. I've seen this done with nearly every Timely over the course of the summer. In the previous paragraph, I stressed the word "quality" because quality is what brings high values. It's one thing to price a VF Timely at 20-30% over NM Guide... or price a true NM unrestored Timely at 2-3 times Guide... even price a Timely in Fine condition or less at 5-15% over Guide. It's quite another thing to price VG Timelys at double Guide!

Some seem to think that if a book is fetching multiples in the unrestored high grades (I classify unrestored Golden Age in Fine or better as high grade), then that same book should fetch the same multiples across the board, regardless of grade. This is far from market reality.

The reason any book fetches over Guide is because of various supply and demand factors. If a book is truly an unrestored NM and it Guides out at $200, one could price it at $200 and have potentially 50 buyers ready to purchase it (with a goodly number of those 50 being dealers). If you raise the price to $250, you now may have only 25 people interested in the book. Raise the price to $300? Now there may be only 10 interested. This continues until the asking price is raised to a point where only one person will be interested. This is the optimum price. I personally feel that any book priced so that two or more people are interested is not priced at this "optimum". Although many won't admit it, I think everyone wants to get as much as possible for their material when they sell it. Using this method is one way. This theory explains why books sell over Guide.

What factors, then, cause such high demand for certain books? Usually three things; condition, scarcity, or both. Many forget this most basic idea... NM books sell over Guide because they are not common (In fact, there may be only a handful of true NM specimens in existence). Understanding this is essential, especially when one asks over Guide (there might be only one copy on the market, yet 50 people are interested).

I think most Timelys in VG are prevalent and collectors know they can turn elsewhere or wait for a better deal down the road if someone over-prices a specific book... but scarcity is the exception to this rule. If a book is common and is in VG



condition, you may not be able to sell it for even 100% of Guide. However, take a book with few, if any, copies on the market (e.g. Suspense Comics #3, presently one of the highest demand books), and it might easily fetch $1,000 in VG (approximately double Guide), or more.

A final thought. The converse of this theory is also applicable. Over-pricing Golden Age books in less than Fine can stagnate the market... and result in little or no activity in this sector of the marketplace.

That's it for now, thanks for reading.

KEN BOWERS

Expanded price spreads... a direct assault on value?

In CBM #25, page 75, Jim Payette argues that the price spread between Good and Mint is too narrow and comments, "In other collectible areas, the distance between Good and Mint can be 100 times. Sales in the comic book market support this change in pricing strategies." Under a 100 to one ratio system I assume Good prices would go down some, perhaps be cut in half but certainly no more. Fine and VF should rise some, but most likely a vast gulf would open between VF and NM. Imagine the exquisite sensitivity of grading required if $100,000 rests on the difference between VF+ and NM-! O.K. for a diamond dealer perhaps...

So to me this looks like a direct assault on the value of my comic book collection. History shows many comics in higher grades than Good also losing value as ratios expanded. For example, here's a review of the price guide history for the past 15 years of one important comic, Donald Duck 4C-62, in Fine condition:

1980 - $400 - Mint = 3 x Good
1982 - $400 - Mint = 5 x Good
1984 - $400 - Mint = 6 x Good
1986 - $354 - Mint = 7 x Good
1992 - $360 - Mint = 8 x Good
1994 - $360 - Mint = 9 x Good
1995 - $433 - Mint = 9 x Good

One hundred to one ratios would greatly amplify the financial loss for mid-grade comics as well as low.

Comic books are by their very nature works of art and for that reason there can be no comparison with stamps or coins or what have you. A dime in Good condition may be worth only a dime, a stamp in Good condition may be more-less worthless and so one might be justified in charging 100 to one ratios for Mint items; but a comic book in Good condition continues to have an intrinsic value, therefore ratios beyond 20 to one are impossible. ■

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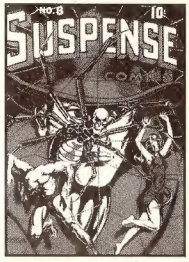

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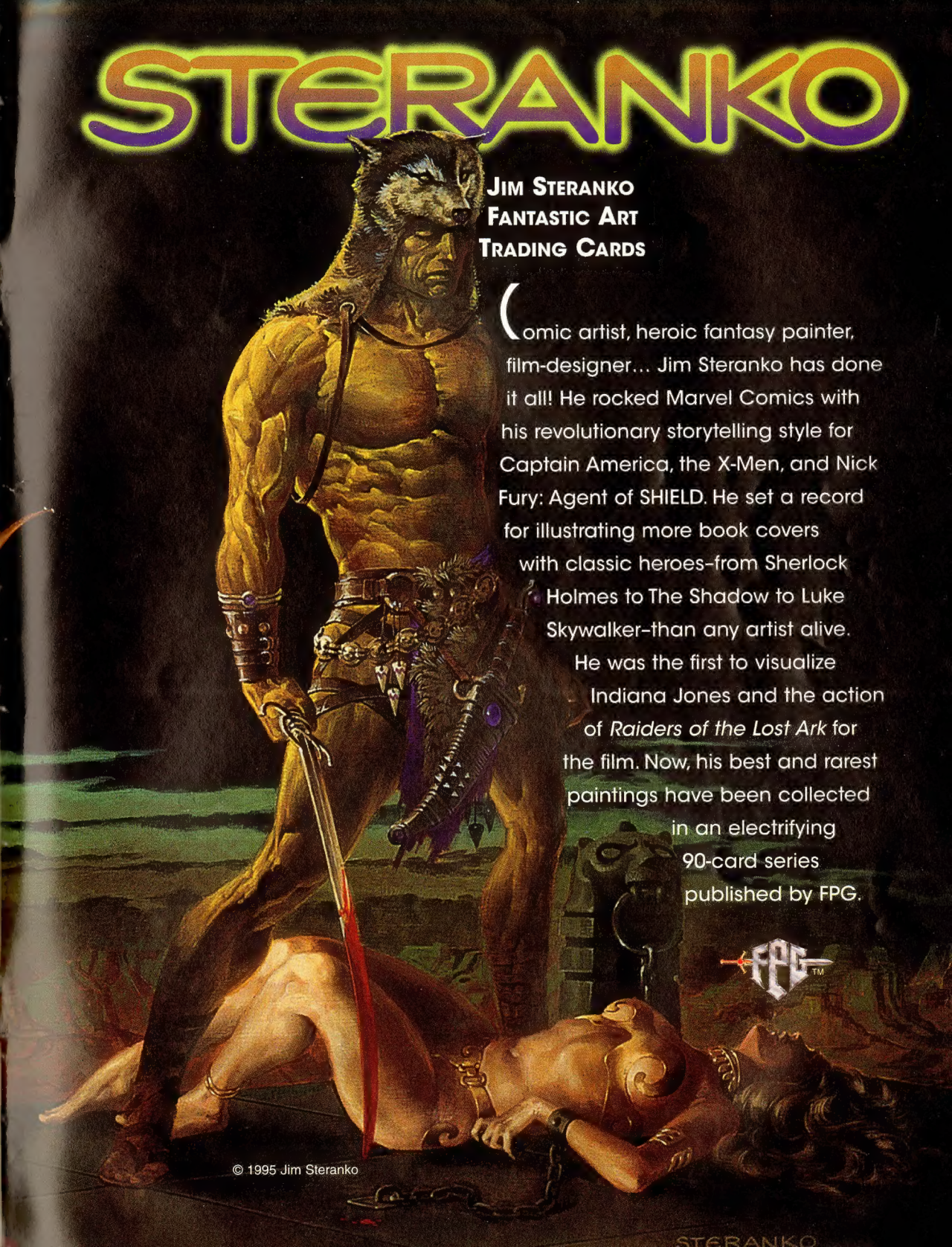
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